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SERMONS

ON THOSE

DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL,

AND ON THOSE

CONSTITUENT PRINCIPLES OF THE
CHURCH,

WHICH

Christian Professors

HAVE MADE THE SUBJECT OF CONTROVERSY.

BY AARON BANCROFT, D. D.

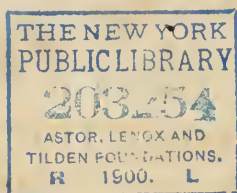
PASTOR OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN WORCESTER.

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit* :

District Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the sixth day of May, A. D. 1822, in the forty-sixth year of the Independence of the United States of America, AARON BANCROFT, D. D. of the said District, has deposited in this office the Title of a Book, the Right whereof he claims as Author, in the words following, *to wit* : "Sermons on those Doctrines of the Gospel, and on those Constituent Principles of the Church, which Christian Professors have made the Subject of Controversy. By AARON BANCROFT, D. D. Pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Worcester."

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the Copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such Copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and also to an Act entitled "An Act supplementary to an Act, entitled An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the Copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such Copies, during the times therein mentioned; and extending the Benefits thereof to the Arts of Designing, Engraving, and Etching Historical and other Prints."

JNO. W. DAVIS, *Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.*

INTRODUCTION,

BY THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE.

THE discourses contained in this volume are presented to the publick by an association of gentlemen, belonging to the Second Congregational Society in Worcester, of which their Reverend Author is Pastor. Having solicited and obtained the manuscripts, to be disposed of at their discretion, some explanation of their views of the importance of the publication seems to be demanded by the occasion. At no period in the history of New-England, has there existed so active a spirit of inquiry on subjects of religion, as at the present time ; a spirit, not confined, as formerly, to men of science and leisure, but pervading almost every grade and condition in society. The advantages of education, which have been so long enjoyed, in common, at our publick schools, by all classes of citizens ; the increasing facilities for obtaining literary distinction in our Academies and our Colleges, and the perfect security guarantied by our laws, to the right of private judgment and of publick discussion, have produced an obvious change in the *intellectual* as well as the *physical* state of our country. There are now comparatively few individuals, capable of moral distinctions, who do not esteem it their *duty* as well as their *privilege* to examine the doctrines proposed for their belief, and to form opinions for themselves, in the all-important concerns of a future life. Doctrinal discourses from the pulpit are now seldom heard with satisfaction, or even with *patience*, if the preacher proposes to do more than to *aid* the inquiries of his hearers. They will hardly suffer him to prescribe a creed for their adoption, or to denounce them for the independent exercise of

their Christian liberty. Every man, indeed, who has much reputation to preserve, as a divine and a scholar, finds it necessary to be cautious in stating opinions to be adopted by others, which cannot be defended by the soundest expositions of scripture, and the fairest deductions of enlightened reason. In the prevalence of this disposition in the community to investigate the grounds of the principal systems of theology, the friends of Christianity have much cause for congratulation. It is an obvious principle of our nature, that the sentiments we profess can have no good practical effect, unless we have a rational and impressive conviction of their justness and their value; such a conviction as can result only from a careful and industrious research into the evidences upon which they are founded, and not from the confidence we repose in the intelligence and piety of any mere human being from whom we have received them. It is really inconceivable, that any one, who feels the importance of religious truth, who would wish to see it triumphant, and would witness, with joy, its purifying influence in the lives of men, should feel any reluctance to encourage that freedom of examination, that personal application to scripture in the full exercise of the strongest energies of mind, by which alone it is most likely to be obtained.

It is true, there have been but few sectarians among Protestants, who have not *professed* their willingness to yield to others those rights of conscience which they have claimed as sacred to themselves, and which they have exercised in their fullest extent. But, unfortunately, this concession has been but *little more* than *profession*. They have generally discarded from their fellowship all who have not subscribed to their views of the doctrines of the bible, charging them with insincerity, moral corruption, and enmity to the truth. With peculiar inconsistency, they have recognized the right of Christians to think and judge for themselves, and yet have insisted that a departure from established theories of human origin was ground sufficient

to deny them the Christian name, exclude them from the ordinances of the gospel and the prospects of immortality. No one will pronounce this an exaggerated representation, who has not been a stranger to the theological controversies of this country. The sect denominated Orthodox, have boldly maintained, that Unitarians were not the *disciples* of Jesus Christ; that they had no reason to apply to themselves the promises of the gospel, and no encouragement to raise their hopes from earth to heaven. Not, however, because they were less blameless in their lives than their orthodox brethren; or because they have done less for the defence of Christianity against the attacks of infidels; or because they have contributed less to increase the general stock of human knowledge, and to the advancement of the world in civilization, in virtue, and happiness; but because they have ventured to bring their reason and their learning to the study of the scriptures, and have attempted, in imitation of the first reformers, to separate the primitive faith from the inventions of men. The orthodox of New-England, in *their turn*, have been condemned by the Calvinists of the south; accused of substituting a new religion for that originally delivered to the saints. Is this the liberty of Protestants, for the enjoyment of which they separated from the Catholic Church? Was it for this, that the fathers of the Reformation, at the hazard of their lives, exposed the extravagant errors and shameless vices of the popish clergy? Was it only that one party among themselves might enslave the consciences of another, that they resisted the arrogant and impious pretensions of the Roman Hierarchy to the divine right of dictating to their deluded followers the articles of their faith? If so, then have they laboured to no purpose—then has the Reformation effected no desirable change in the condition of mankind. If individual Christians are not competent to ascertain the essential doctrines of Revelation; if an appeal must be made to *any* human tribunal, to know what must be believed to inherit eternal life, that appeal ought cer-

tainly to be made to the Pope, and his councils of assembled Bishops, who, without dispute, have the strongest claims to infallibility. But there is reason to believe that the mild spirit of Christianity has begun to lessen the rigour of sectarian bigotry, and soften the asperity of religious discussions. The experience of three hundred years of bitter contentions and mutual recriminations among Protestant parties, has begun to convince them of the folly of *expecting* uniformity of opinion, and the criminality of making it a condition of the exercise of charity. Candid inquirers are every day multiplying among us, "calling no man master on earth," but ready to avail themselves of the labours of wisdom and experience to guide them in the study of the sacred oracles. Such a state of feeling in the community, seems to require, that a denomination of Christians, whose distinguishing views of religion have been so long the theme of animadversion, as have been those of Unitarians, should be able to refer those who would examine them, to authors, where they may be found, stated with clearness, and defended with candour. To this denomination belong the publishers of the following Sermons, and with these impressions they present them to the publick. It is not because the opinions they have embraced have not been ably explained and supported by numerous writers of profound erudition and exalted piety, that they deem this publication necessary. If the correctness of religious tenets could be tested by the talents, the learning, or the moral worth of those who have maintained them, the faith of Unitarians might safely rest on such authorities as Locke, and Newton, and Clark, and Lardner, and Emlyn, and Priestly, and Price. In the works of these distinguished men, and of many others; may be found a vindication of the sentiments they profess. But these are not within the reach of the great body of readers, nor are they *all* adapted to such capacities. The publishers are not aware, that the Christian community are possessed of a book, which exhibits a connected view of their doctrines

in the form of *Sermons*, (and these are most likely to be read by persons of common attainments,) while Calvinists have been careful to fill the *world* with sectarian books of every description, from the most learned, down to the child's primer. The discourses in this volume, with the exception of one or two, were delivered by the author to his own people within the last two years, and were not written in the expectation that they would be given to the world. He has yielded his opinion of the expediency of the publication to the solicitations of his friends. They form a regular series upon those permanent doctrines of Christianity which now divide the two principal classes, called *Orthodox* or *Calvinistick*, and *Liberal* or *Unitarian*. In these discourses is presented, in connected order, a fair statement of the doctrines of Calvinism, as laid down by the most approved writers; the leading objections to which those doctrines are liable, are brought into view, together with the opinions which liberal Christians oppose to them; and all this is done in a style and manner easy to be comprehended by ordinary understandings. If the reader should think them not entitled to the credit, either of novelty of arrangement, or originality of argument, he is reminded, that they were not composed to enlighten the *learned*, but to instruct a promiscuous assembly. He will find, however, what is, perhaps, of more consequence, the great grounds of difference between these contending parties, stated with distinctness, and treated with liberality.

To Christians of all denominations, the subjects discussed in these Sermons are deeply interesting. It is of unspeakable importance to all who expect salvation upon the terms of the gospel to obtain correct views of the divine character and attributes; of the character of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world—just apprehensions of the nature of that mediation by which man is redeemed from moral death, and of the duties and accountability of rational beings. Such considerations, it is believed, will render these Sermons acceptable and useful.

But there is a further one, which entitles them to respectful attention. This arises from the age, the experience, and the character of their author. Doctor Bancroft was inducted into the Pastoral office in Worcester on the first day of February, 1786. His society had found it necessary to separate from the first parish in this town, in consequence of a difference on doctrinal points. Calvinists and Arminians were the prominent opposing parties of that day, to the latter of which the new society were attached. And so powerful were the *former* throughout the country, and so exclusive in their intercourse in this vicinity, that for many years he found few neighbouring clergymen disposed to reciprocate ministerial labours, or willing to recognize his official character. For a long time he was excluded from the associations of ministers in this county, disowned as a minister, and reviled as a heretick. Under such discouragements, did Dr. Bancroft commence the duties of his high vocation. For thirty-six years he has continued to discharge the duties of his station with a consistency of character which none have surpassed, and a steadiness of purpose from which nothing could divert him; and it is a fact well known to the writer of these introductory pages, that the most zealous Calvinists have yielded him the praise of an irreproachable life, and of being an *honourable* though *formidable* opponent.

After a critical and laborious review of his early opinions, at a period of life when nothing but the soberness of truth can interest the mind, Dr. Bancroft engaged in composing the Sermons contained in this volume. He brought to the work a mind enlarged and invigorated by a long course of study and of practical discipline. They exhibit the views of a Divine who has reflected much and read extensively; and the publishers are confident that, if they fail to *convince* the reader, they will at least *assist* him in establishing his faith in the concerns of religion, enlarge his charity to others, and strengthen his habits of piety and virtue.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE religious controversy of the day occasioned the delivery of the series of sermons contained in this volume. Their publication results from the request of those who heard them.

When the discourses were written, the author had no intention of publishing them, and was not, therefore, careful particularly to note his authorities for the facts stated. This neglect he now regrets, more especially in relation to that part of the work which contains a succinct history of the corruptions of the Papal Church, and of the Protestant Reformation; because a review of Mosheim, Priestley, Campbell, and the appropriate articles in Rees' Cyclopædia, (the principal authors consulted,) would require more time than he has to bestow on the subject. The respective statements were made on evidence deemed substantial; and, on examination, it is presumed they will be generally found correct.

More than twenty years since, the author perused the sermons of Rev. Nichol Scott, on the final extinction of the wicked.--- These sermons being nearly out of print, the author made an abstract of them, which on this occasion has been referred to; and he has now no means of determining how far he is dependent on them for argument and expression. The discourse therefore, on this subject, (that no injustice may be done,) is presented to the publick as substantially the views of an English divine.

It is not expected that the doctrinal sermons will be approved by every portion of the religious community; but the hope is entertained that, by the blessing of God, they may promote the best interests of Christianity.

Worcester, May, 1822.

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SERMON I.

RELIGION IN MAN A RATIONAL AND VOLUNTARY SERVICE.

LUKE xii. 56.

*Ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth ; but
how is it, that ye do not discern this time ?*

JESUS Christ, in the establishment of his religion, did not adopt measures of compulsion. He taught men every essential religious truth, propounded laws for the government of their conduct, and addressed them with the most persuasive motives. He then left men to act freely, that the happiness of his disciples might be the reward of obedience, which flows from an enlightened mind and a teachable temper.

Our Saviour exhibited the clearest proof of a divine mission. By his life, he displayed the moral worth of his character. To the Jews he stated, that in him their prophecies were fulfilled : in the presence of those who followed him, he wrought miracles ; and he called on his countrymen to examine his doctrines, to reflect on his works, and to weigh the actions of his life ; and for themselves

determine, whether they might not confidently receive his communications, obey his precepts, and rely on his promises.

This is the substance of the appeal in our text. In the previous verses, Jesus had observed to those who accompanied him, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, there cometh a shower, and so it is; and when ye perceive the south wind to blow, ye say, there will be heat, and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites! ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it, that ye do not discern this time? From usual appearances, you form a correct judgment of the effects of natural principles; why do ye not seriously attend to the moral dispensations of God, and, by the evidence produced, become satisfied of the divine origin of the doctrines I inculcate? In our subsequent context, our Saviour prefaces a case of moral duty with the question, Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right? It is then evident, that Christ recognized powers in man to judge of the evidence on which his religion is founded, and to perceive that his instructions are conformable to the unchangeable laws of truth and rectitude.

A number of important inferences may be drawn from this appeal of our Saviour to the human mind.

1. Religion in man is a rational and voluntary service.

God has imparted to man the attributes of reason and liberty. These constitute him the subject of a moral government, and make him capable of virtuous action. Take away these faculties, and he

ceases to be the proper object of rewards or punishment. Without moral liberty, man may be the instrument of actions which in their effects are salutary or pernicious ; but in the agent there can be neither virtue nor vice. To constitute any course of actions good, in a moral sense, the agent must be conscious of his duty, and possess a disposition and power to perform it. Actions in which the will of the agent is not concerned, have no property of virtue ; and in their production the powers of a moral being are not exercised. The manner in which the faculties of the human mind are used, determines the moral character. The intention fixes the moral complexion of human conduct. The same action in this man is a virtue, and in that a vice. An example will fully illustrate this remark. Two men unite to feed and clothe a hungry and naked fellow-being ; one discharges this humane office from a conviction that it is a social duty, of indispensable obligation—and in him the duty is virtuous and worthy of praise ; the other adopts this form of benevolence towards a suffering object, as the means to gain his confidence, and thereby to ensnare and ruin him—and this malignant intention renders the action vile and wicked. Reason to distinguish good from evil, and liberty to choose the one and refuse the other, render men capable of moral conduct and moral government. This distinction between free and necessary agents being taken away, men are let down to the level of beasts, or they become mere machines, and there is no more moral worth in their actions than there is in the effects produced by the established laws of the natural

kingdom. To suspect the motive, would be uncharitable, when the conduct is habitually good—because the life furnishes to us the best evidence of the state of the heart ; but God judgeth not as men judge : he looketh at the heart, and decideth on the moral worth of our conduct from our secret intention and purpose. From every view we can take of our subject, it will appear, that as rational and free beings we are subjected to moral laws, and that it is in the right exercise of our reason and liberty that we become religious men.

2. I infer, it is the duty of men to improve all the means they enjoy, to enlighten their minds on the subject of religion.

To act rationally and freely in the important concerns of religion, we must know its foundation, and be made acquainted with its essential truths and duties. We cannot consistently perform the offices of religion, while ignorant of its first principles, any more than we can converse intelligibly in a language with which we are unacquainted. Suppose an individual educated in a country where the true religion is professed—yet a traditional reception of it, without a knowledge of the grounds of his faith or the reasons of his hope, would not entitle him to praise. Had he been born in a different country, he would have embraced its religion, however false and absurd. Is there no advantage, then, it will be asked, in the traditional reception of the true religion ? Much every way ; chiefly because this is a providential means of acquiring the knowledge of many religious truths and moral duties, of which an individual would otherwise have been ignorant :

these he admits on divine authority ; and, to maintain a good conscience, he lives in their habitual exercise, and is thereby formed to a virtuous disposition. But his faith, being founded on an accidental circumstance of his nativity, and not being the result of inquiry and conviction, has in itself no worth. The Parent of Life favourably appointed the place of his birth, and by this circumstance his religious superstructure is erected on the basis of truth ; but from it he himself can claim no merit. But in the man, who cultivates his intellectual powers, who examines the foundation of his religion, weighs its evidence, and adopts it on conviction of its truth, faith is a moral exercise, acceptable to God. This man has preserved his mind free from the influence of prejudice, and his heart from the bias of sin ; and obedience in him is the act of an enlightened judgment, as well as of a sound conscience.

The observations made respecting religion as a system will apply to its several parts. If our understanding must be convinced before we can consistently profess the belief that a particular religion is true, then its peculiar doctrines must be examined and understood before we can consistently embrace them. To believe as this master in theology, or as that church believes, is not to give a sufficient reason for our faith. We stand on our own foundation, not theirs ; their answers will not be accepted as ours in the day of judgment. The right of private judgment will not be questioned. If we voluntarily resign it, we part with our religious capacity, we undermine the foundation of personal re-

ligion, and can no longer live in the rational exercise of faith or hope. Implicit confidence can never be safely reposed on human authority. Religious instructors are forbidden to exercise dominion over the faith of their fellow-men, but they are directed to be the helpers of their joy.

We are commanded to call no man father, knowing that one is our Father, who is in heaven. We are solemnly warned not to judge one another, knowing that every one shall account for himself to God. When we resign our understandings and consciences to fallible men, and receive human formularies as the standard of sound doctrine, we remove ourselves from the foundation of the gospel, and have no sure basis on which to rest; and we shall be exposed to all the impositions which the weakness or ignorance, the worldly interests or the personal ambition of men can introduce into the Christian church. Reason and revelation, I think, warrant the position, 'that every man who seriously endeavours to acquire the knowledge of divine truth, and habitually practises according to the dictates of an enlightened conscience, will be accepted at the final judgment; but the individual who complies with this condition of acceptance can be positively *ascertained* only by him who knows the heart. To the serious consideration of those who feel disposed to condemn a brother merely for his Christian opinions, I present the reproof of our Saviour to his disciples, Ye know not what spirit ye are of.

As the understanding of a man must be enlightened, and his judgment convinced, before he can

consistently embrace any system of doctrine, I infer,

3. That uniformity of religious opinion is not to be expected even among Christians.

The natural understandings of men differ, their education is dissimilar, and their course of life is various. These circumstances lead to different views of religion and of all other subjects. A truth that is plain and evident to the man of ten talents, may be unintelligible to him who possesses but one. What you deem to be a mere rite of religion, your neighbour may hold as a fundamental principle of the gospel. No one ought to adopt the opinion of another against the dictates of his own mind. Speculative differences, when accompanied with Christian virtues in the life, should not be made the occasion of uncharitableness among disciples who acknowledge a common Master. Is this opening too widely the door of charity? Look into the New Testament, and there learn the term of admission into the Christian church. This is simply a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Such was the confession of Peter—*We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* And of Mary—*I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God.* On this confession, Philip baptized the Samaritan converts and the eunuch of Ethiopia. On a similar profession of faith, St. Paul baptized the jailer and other Gentile disciples. If the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the Son of God was all the apostles required for admission into the Christian community, shall we demand more, and deny the Christianity of the man who, professing

the name of Christ, manifests by his life that he faithfully observes the directions of his divine Lord? Shall we exclude from our fellowship all who do not receive the whole system of doctrines which we believe to be revealed in the gospel? We shall then probably exclude from our charity the greater number of Christian professors. Should our principle of fellowship be generally adopted, the Christian church could never be relieved from bitter disputes and destructive divisions.

The signs of the times led my reflections to our present subject. Many of this audience know that the history of American Unitarianism, originally issued from a British press, has lately been re-published in our Commonwealth, and a strong appeal made to the publick on the system of doctrine therein unfolded. The purpose of the Editors probably was to depress Unitarianism in our country, by the weight of publick odium. They insinuated that Unitarian Ministers, in the apprehension that their cause would not bear the light, were endeavouring to promote it in a secret and insidious manner. On this representation of timidity and concealment, the Editors exclaim, "Are these the true representatives of the Apostles and martyrs, glorifying God by an *open profession* of his gospel, and not ashamed to own their Lord before men? Is this the *simplicity* and *godly sincerity* of the gospel?" Thus assailed, Unitarian Ministers were compelled publickly to vindicate themselves. They corrected the gross errors in the statement of their opponents, explained their opinions, and adduced scriptural authority for their support. Whether

the general effect on the publick mind corresponds with the expectations of those who originated the dispute, the present state of the Unitarian controversy in our country will decide. Prejudices are in some degree subsiding. Learned Theologians with us now defend their peculiar tenets in the spirit of our religion.

The time for inquiry and investigation is come ; and our citizens, liberated from the shackles of a national establishment, will not receive the dogmas of schoolmen as the truths of revelation. On the minds of the clergy of our Commonwealth there is no bias from a view to the emolument of high ecclesiastical offices, nor from a fear of ecclesiastical censures, which the civil power will enforce by the forfeiture of salaries, by fines and imprisonment. These circumstances are highly favourable to free and candid inquiry, and they tend to elevate the character of a Christian community. But all human advantages are attended with inconvenience, and are liable to abuse. When men think for themselves, they form different opinions even on subjects the most important ; and if they hold their peculiar sentiments with an uncandid spirit, and refuse Christian fellowship with those who differ from them, the society of Christians must be divided into numberless sects, and few of them will possess the means to support the publick institutions of the gospel in a respectable manner. Most of those who acknowledge the divine origin of Christianity embrace all the principles that are essential to its effectual establishment. Let Christ-

ians, then, in forbearance and charity, permit each other to judge for themselves respecting doctrines, in the explanation of which the wisest and best men have disagreed, and then they may mutually co-operate in promoting the reign of their common Lord.

Professors with us, at the present day, may be classed in two great divisions, Calvinists and Liberal or Unitarian Christians. Perhaps the most distinguishing point of difference between them respects the office of reason in the sacred concerns of religion. The Calvinists style themselves the orthodox, evangelical professors; and they require that the mysteries of revelation, as they denominate them, should be received, though these cannot be explained, in humble submission to Divine Wisdom. Numbers of this class seem disposed to attribute opposition to their peculiar system of faith to the obstinacy of a mind not rectified by divine grace. Some more ardent, altogether deny the Christianity of those who reject their peculiar views. In answer to these allegations, we say, that, among all denominations, worthy and unworthy professors may be found—that, in each, the most perfect disciples have occasion to lament their weakness and their failings—and that, with every denomination, the fruits manifested by the life and conversation should furnish the rule of charitable judgment, and not doctrinal opinions.

In respect to the office of reason in religious concerns, we hold that without the exercise of reason, no man can be a consistent disciple of Jesus Christ. Indeed, we perceive that Calvinists never

reject the authority of reason, when it can be brought to support their positions. We hold, that by the exercise of reason a judgment is formed of the evidence by which our religion is proved to be true—by reason we make up our opinions of the doctrines contained in the sacred scriptures—and by reason we pronounce on the purity and excellence of the precepts and institutions of the gospel. Though we do not pretend to comprehend God in his attributes, in his works or ways, yet we say that our duty extends no further than our capacity for knowledge extends; and that we cannot consistently admit any position as a doctrine of divine revelation, which consists of a set of terms conveying no distinct ideas to the mind, much less if it involve a direct contradiction, or is manifestly opposed to admitted principles of rectitude and goodness. Deny this, and we are denied the power to distinguish between a true and false religion, between good and evil, between virtue and vice.

You, my candid hearers, are witnesses that, in my general course of preaching, I have dwelt on the undisputed doctrines of revelation, and on the important duties of the Christian character; though I have not studied concealment of my opinion on any religious subject, but as occasion dictated have, as far as I understood it, declared unto you the whole counsel of God. Unusual attention is at this day given to doctrinal questions on which Christians have divided. Disquisitions, on these subjects are now circulated among every class in society, by the distribution of sermons, religious tracts, and theological journals; and the peculiar tenets of

the two great divisions of believers are frequently made the subject of conversation in our families. Under these circumstances, I think it expedient to give my opinion from the pulpit, on the important questions now agitated. Assured of your attention and candour, I intend to deliver a course of sermons on Christian theology. My plan is extensive, and embraces the unity of God—the derived existence and divine commission of Jesus Christ, the Mediator—the primitive state of the Christian church—the corruptions and abuses introduced by ecclesiasticks, and particularly by the Roman Pontiff—the nature and extent of the Reformation in the sixteenth century—the system of Calvin—the peculiar doctrines of revelation—the design of the positive institutions of the gospel—and the rewards and punishments of a future world. Relying on your support, I shall, with as few intermissions as possible, on the morning of every sabbath, God granting me bodily and mental strength, deliver a discourse on a doctrinal subject, till the design, of which I now give the outlines, shall be executed.

In conclusion,

Let us, my respected hearers, improve the means we enjoy for the acquisition of Christian knowledge. May we not hold the truth in unrighteousness, but live in the maintenance of a conscience void of offence towards God and man. Then we shall be able to give an answer to every man who asketh us the reason of the hope which is in us. The moral excellence of the gospel will not only entertain our minds, but also purify our hearts, and form us to the disposition requisite to enjoy the fu-

ture rewards it promises to its obedient disciples. In this world we shall realize the support, the consolation, and joy, which Christianity is fitted to yield to those who are imbued with its spirit; and, at the close of our probation, we shall be found of our Judge in peace; and the approving sentence will be pronounced on us individually, Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

SERMON II.

JESUS CHRIST DOES NOT POSSESS THE ATTRIBUTES OF
SUPREME DIVINITY.

JOHN xvii. 3.

This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

EFFECTUALLY to defend the Christian system, we must separate from it the corruptions which ignorant or designing men have introduced. In this age of inquiry and investigation, neither the sanction which time gives to generally received opinions, nor the solemnity associated with important religious doctrines will support principles opposed to the obvious sense of scripture, and to the simple dictates of reason.

The Unitarian controversy has been forced on liberal Christians; and it becomes our bounden duty to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. We reject the doctrine of the Trinity, because, by its admission, we must receive as a doctrine of revelation, and as a term of Christian fellowship, a number of words which either have no meaning, or amount to a plain contradic-

tion ; and because, in our apprehension, the doctrine is opposed to the particular and the general language of scripture respecting the character of God.

The Unity of God is an essential principle of true religion. The Divine Unity is inculcated in every part of the bible, as the basis of exalted piety. In the Old Testament, Moses, with the highest solemnity, summons the attention of his people to this great truth—*Hear, O Israel ! the Lord our God is one Lord.* On this foundation, our Saviour erects all pious offices.—“Hear, O Israel ! the Lord our God is one Lord ; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. Moses informs the Israelites that the knowledge of the Divine Unity was a great purpose of the communications of Heaven to them.—“Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that he is God : there is none else beside him.” The prophet Isaiah, speaking in the name of the Almighty, says, “I am the Lord ; there is none else ; there is no God beside me.” In the New Testament, our Saviour confirms this fundamental religious truth—“This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” This essential verity St. Paul asserts in his epistle to Timothy.—“There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ;” and to the Corinthians he declares, “To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”

I need not adduce more passages of scripture to prove the Unity of God. All Trinitarians profess to hold this doctrine ; but we think their opinions on this most important subject to be subversive of the Divine Unity. They represent God as one being, existing in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Each of these persons has a distinct and separate province of action, and in it each has his own full and complete agency. In the salvation of sinners, the office of the Father is distinct from that of the Son, and the office of the Son as distinct from that of the Holy Ghost. Each of these persons is self-existent, and possessed of all divine attributes. Are these three persons one God, or three Gods ? In the Trinitarian creed, Christ is represented as the second person in the Godhead, co-existent and co-equal with the Father, and of himself “very God.” In opposition to the Trinitarian formulary, we believe that Jesus Christ is a being of derived existence, and therefore cannot possess the attributes of supreme divinity. We acknowledge him as the Son of God, the anointed Saviour of sinners, and the constituted Judge of man ; but we hold that, in his high and benevolent agency, as Mediator, he acted under a commission given him by the one true God, who is over all blessed forever.

The character and office of Jesus Christ will be the subject of the present discourse. To its consideration, this audience, I trust, will bring minds free from prejudice. My present purpose is to make it apparent that Jesus Christ is a being distinct from God, and subordinate to him. In doing

this, I shall introduce no metaphysical arguments, nor adduce any human authority. The proof brought in support of the proposition will be the plain and express declarations of our Saviour himself, and one or two passages from the epistles of St. Paul.

I shall present the subject to your deliberate judgment under the following propositions.

1. Jesus Christ declared himself to be a being distinct from God.

2. He disclaimed the essential attributes of Supreme Divinity, underived power, omniscience, and absolute goodness; and he proclaimed his inferiority to the Father.

3. He appeared in our world as the Messenger of God, and preached to men not his own doctrines, but the doctrines of God who sent him.

4. Christ himself prayed to God as the only proper object of worship, and directed his disciples to offer their prayers to God through him as the Mediator.

5. Having completed the business of his mission on earth, Jesus ascended to his God in heaven, and there received the reward of his obedience to the Divine Will unto death, even the death of the cross.

On these high and important points, the declarations of our Saviour must be satisfactory to all. It will be my endeavour to make comments on his declarations, in a manner that may be fully understood, even by those who are least acquainted with religious controversy.

1. Jesus Christ declared himself to be a being distinct from God. Our text may be first stated in proof of this position.—“Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come ; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth : I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory I had with thee before the world was.” Is it possible that two beings should be more clearly distinguished from each other, than Christ here distinguishes himself from God? In the passage, he speaks of himself in his most exalted character, as the Messiah, executing a divine commission, and giving eternal life to man. What is its obvious meaning? There is only one true God—Jesus is the Christ, or the anointed of God, whom he sent into the world, to whom he gave power to confer eternal life on the children of God ; a declaration that Jesus had accomplished the moral purpose, for which God sent him into the world, and thereby manifested the glory of the Being who thus sent him ; and a devout prayer that he might be admitted to the divine presence, there to receive the honour and glory appointed as the reward of the faithful execution of the office of Mediator on earth. If any one doubt whether, in these passages, Christ speaks of himself as a distinct being from God—subordinate to him—

receiving a commission from him—invested with power for its execution—declaring the accomplishment of the high purposes of his embassy—and invoking the reward of obedience to a divine command,—let him try to put similar sentiments into plainer language. Under this head of our subject, it is not necessary to quote more passages. The same distinction will be apparent in every text produced on subsequent points. Though Trinitarians admit the Unity of God, they contend for three persons in the Godhead. While they object to the common meaning of the term person, in their reasonings they adopt it in its usual sense ; and unless the general acceptation of the term be admitted, either their arguments are unintelligible or their conclusions do not follow from their premises. I can form no other conception of three persons as separate agents, than of three beings ; nor of a Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, than of three Gods.

The Jews of our Saviour's day accused him of blasphemy, and alleged that, being a man, he made himself God. Did Jesus on this occasion claim the attributes of Deity ? Hear his own reply. " Jesus answered them—Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods ? If he called them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken ; say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest ; because I said, I am the Son of God ? "

2. Jesus Christ disclaimed the essential attributes of Supreme Divinity, underived power, omniscience, and absolute goodness ; and he proclaimed his inferiority to the Father.

Our Saviour claimed not for himself underived power.—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself. Of myself I can do nothing.” After his resurrection, and in his last address to his disciples, his language is—“All power is given unto me, in heaven and on earth.” In these passages, Christ is speaking of the moral purposes of his mediatorial office. In one of them he affirms, that of himself he could do nothing; and in the other, that he was invested with power from God to carry to consummation the high purposes of his kingdom.

When one asked him—“Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God.” God alone possesses original, inexhaustible, infinite goodness. We have brought the clearest proof that Christ acknowledged himself a being distinct from God; and we here learn that he disclaimed the goodness which is an attribute of Deity.

Omniscience our Saviour also disclaimed. Predicting the heaviest judgments to his countrymen, and at the same time, in the opinion of many, directing the minds of his disciples to the day of final retribution, he declares—“Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, nor the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son; but the Father.” In language which cannot be mistaken, Jesus here avers, that in respect to the precise period when the predicted judgments would be inflicted, he himself was ignorant, and that God only knew it. The manner in which an attempt is made to evade the

force of this and similar declarations of our Saviour, I shall notice in the close of the present discourse.

An avowal of inferiority to God is implied in every text selected to support our several positions.—I shall adduce one directly to this point.—“My Father is greater than I.” Our Saviour, in the place where this declaration is made, was addressing his disciples on the subject of his death, and opening sources of comfort to them, from the prospects which his resurrection would present to their view; and, as the greatest support to their minds, he states that the moral purposes of his reign would be consummated by the assistance of God. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I. I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.” Christ evidently here speaks of himself in his most exalted character, and absolutely disclaims an equality with the Father.

3. Jesus Christ declares that he appeared in our world as the Messenger of God; and that he preached not his own doctrines, but those of his Father who sent him.

Numerous passages might be brought in support of this position. I must be satisfied with a few of the most select.—“I am come in my Father’s name. Then cried Jesus in the temple, I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true. I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. My doctrine is not

mine, but his that sent me. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I can do nothing of myself; but as my Father taught me, I speak these things. I have not spoken of myself; but the Father, who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." In a prayer addressed by our Saviour to God, we find the following expressions—"I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me." All these texts have an immediate reference to the high moral purposes of the divine mission of Jesus Christ. Additional comments are not necessary; their meaning cannot be made more plain by any remarks of mine.

4. Jesus Christ prayed to God, as the great object of worship; and he directed his disciples to offer their prayers to God through him as the one Mediator.

Every Christian knows that our divine Lord has set us an example as respects the duty of prayer, as well as in all other instances of piety and virtue. He joined with his countrymen in the publick offices of their religion, and often retired for private devotion. But every Christian does not attend to the fair inference from these facts, that Christ must be a being subordinate to God, to whom his prayers are directed. Let us then hear the language of our Saviour in prayer.—"Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard

me ; and I knew that thou hearest me always ; but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” These expressions of thanks have reference to the success of his ministry. Attend to his petitions when oppressed by personal suffering.—“ Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. He went away the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done. When they came to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ; and gave up the ghost.” These are the expressions not of Supreme Divinity, but of a being dependent and actually suffering.

Christ not only prayed to God himself, but he also directed his disciples to offer their prayers, not to him, but to God through him as Mediator.—“ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain ; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will

give it you. At that day ye shall ask in my name ; and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you ; because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” The prayer which our Lord taught his disciples is addressed to God the Father, in heaven.

5. Jesus Christ having accomplished the business of his mission on earth, ascended to God in heaven, and there received the reward of his obedience to the divine will, even unto death, the death of the cross.

Our Saviour himself declared to his followers that he should ascend to glory ; and his inspired apostles inform us of his actual ascent to the glory and honour which were provided for him in heaven. Christ thus addresses God in our subsequent context—“I have glorified thee on the earth ; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” After his resurrection, he sent the following message to his immediate disciples—“Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.”

The apostle Paul gives us a description of the honours to which Christ is raised.—“Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross : wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." The same apostle, speaking of the empire of Christ in heaven, says, "He must reign till he has put all things under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."

What is the import of the passages from scripture now recited? It will be recollected, that with the exception of one or two texts from the writings of St. Paul, they are the very words of our Saviour himself. Do they not fully prove the truth of our respective propositions? Do they not warrant the reception of the following positions as Christian verities? There is one only God, and Jesus Christ was his messenger to men. Christ does not possess the essential attributes of Deity—Christ was sent into our world by God—wrought miracles in confirmation of his divine mission by power derived from God—delivered messages committed to him by the Father of Being—prayed God to succeed the moral purposes of his reign—attested his sincerity by the sacrifice of his life—arose from the grave and ascended to heaven, and was there crowned with honour and glory, and empowered to consummate the design of his office as Mediator. This great and merciful purpose being accomplished, he will resign his commission into the

hand of God who gave it, and God will be all in all. The declarations of Christ were made not in figures of speech, nor under allusions to the rites and ceremonies instituted by Moses, but in language the most simple and plain.

Was it the sole intention of any writer to show that a particular being was not God, could he use phraseology more fully expressive of his design than that which Jesus Christ here adopts respecting himself? Admit the supposition that Christ is very God, and what contradictions and absurdities follow! At the same time he was in heaven encircled with all the attributes of Deity, and on earth in fashion as a man. He was the being sending, and the being sent; he was the being praying, and the being to whom the prayer was addressed; from himself he received a commission for a high purpose; to himself returned this commission, that he himself might be all in all; and, further, the mere idea of which must shock the moral sensibility of every mind, God, a spiritual being, who is not confined to place, nor excluded from it, ascended from earth to heaven clothed with a body.

Trinitarians attempt to give a meaning to the above passages, in consistency with their peculiar doctrine. They represent Christ as a being of a complex character, existing with two minds or souls, a divine and an human, and that he is very God and very man. They refer all the declarations of our Saviour, which we have recited, to his human nature; and affirm that, by this method of interpretation, they preserve the harmony of scripture, and give a consistent sense to passages which speak of

Jesus as a being of derived existence, and acting under a divine commission, suffering and dying, and those which ascribe to him the perfections of Deity. But can two distinct minds, the one infinite and the other finite, constitute one being? This distinction between the human and divine nature of Christ is not found in the bible. No passages can be brought which expressly contain this doctrine, and the general phraseology of scripture is directly opposed to it. This distinction, we believe, was invented in the school of theologians, to avoid a conclusion otherwise unavoidable ; and invented in an age when hypothesis, and not investigation and experiment, was made the basis of all science. But even this distinction, unfounded as I conceive it to be, will not, I apprehend, answer the purpose for which it is adduced. Let us test it by two of the texts above recited.—“My Father is greater than I.” Christ was addressing his disciples on the highest design of his mediatorial office when he made this declaration, and therefore speaking of himself in his most exalted character ; and, as a ground of confidence, he mentions the assistance which God would grant him in the prosecution of his sacred trust. Allow that the assertion has reference only to the human nature of Christ, and we make him solemnly declare that, as it respects power to re-animate the dead, and to raise his disciples to eternal life, God is greater than man. In men we should say this is trifling with sacred things. Take next the prediction of divine judgments—“Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Fa-

ther.” The comparison is not here made between the human and the divine nature of Christ; there can be no pretence for this. We here find a regular gradation from man to God. No man knoweth this day, no, nor the angels of heaven, nor the Son of God, but the Father only. The rank of the Son is above that of the angels, and must refer to him in his most exalted character. In this character he knew not the day. The declaration is made in the same form in which Christ speaks of sitting in judgment on the human race, and no intimation is given that the assertion is limited. To suppose then, under these circumstances, that Jesus knew not the day as man, but knew it as a divine person, is to suppose an equivocation altogether unworthy of an instructor of truth and righteousness. What should we think of the veracity of a man who, having one eye defective, should direct a sound organ to an object clearly within his vision; and then, without any qualification, and on a subject, too, the most important, should solemnly declare that he did not see this object—mentally meaning that he did not see it with the defective eye, though he had a clear sight of it with that which was perfect?

Reflecting, my Christian brethren, on the voluntary mission of our Saviour, and on his sufferings and death in the execution of his benevolent design to deliver us from the pollutions of sin, and to redeem us from the empire of death, let us, grateful for his mediation, imbibe his spirit, and adorn our lives with the virtues of his religion. At his second appearing, may we be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

SERMON III.

THE HUMANITARIAN AND ARIAN DOCTRINE RESPECTING
THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

JOHN viii. 58.

*Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before
Abraham was, I am.*

UNITARIAN Christians of the present day may be divided into two classes. One of these believe that our Saviour existed prior to his appearance on earth; the other maintain that he was merely a man, chosen by God to be his distinguished Prophet to his brethren of the human family; to whom the spirit of inspiration was given without measure; and who was invested with power from on high to qualify him to be the great agent in accomplishing the purposes of divine mercy in the salvation of sinners.

The Humanitarian doctrine is the most simple, and approaches nearest to the methods which God has usually adopted for the moral instruction and improvement of the world of mankind. Jesus was born of a woman, he lived as a man liveth, and died as men die. Jesus is spoken of as a man, where the inspired writer contrasts the effects of the apos-

tacy with the benefits resulting from the mediation of Christ.—“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The dispensation which preceded the gospel was founded by a man; and the desponding language of the apostles of Jesus, at his crucifixion, make it apparent that, during his life, they supposed him to have been a mere man; and after his resurrection they nowhere express the surprise which they must have felt, on the discovery of the existence and rank which their Lord held in heaven before his advent into our world. Peter, in the first sermon he preached, and which was delivered at the moment of the descent of the Holy Ghost, speaks in the following manner of his divine Master—“Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus, a *man* approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you.” St. Paul, when addressing the philosophers of Athens respecting God, the doctrine of repentance, the resurrection, and the final judgment, adopts the following language—“God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that *man* whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Our view thus far favours the Humanitarian scheme. I candidly acknowledge that many texts found in the New Testament are difficult to be reconciled with any other doctrine; and I as freely express an opinion, that, by this doctrine, no revealed truth is lessened in its author-

ity, no law is weakened in its force, nor is any promise diminished in its influence. Our Christian faith and hope rest not on the metaphysical character of our Saviour, but on the evidence he produced of a divine commission to state the conditions of acceptance with God, and to give an assurance of eternal life to all who obey him. But the sacred writers are ever consistent with themselves, and consistent with each other. We may not from a given number of texts form an hypothesis, and force all other parts of scripture to support it. This would be to impose a meaning on the inspired writers, and not to take a meaning from them. There are many passages of the New Testament which it would be very difficult for me, in consistency with the established rules of language, to accommodate to the Humanitarian scheme; and can we, without doing violence to the general representation of the evangelists and apostles, respecting the character and office, the agency and death, the exaltation and government of Christ, make these comport with the supposition that Christ was a mere man?

Arians hold that Jesus Christ, a created being, existed in heaven before his appearance on earth; that in an appropriate sense he is the Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person; that God appointed him to be the Mediator of a covenant of grace and mercy; that in conformity to this appointment, Christ commenced his ministry with men; established the conditions of pardon and salvation; taught the truths pertaining to life eternal; set an

example of obedience to all his disciples ; yielded himself to the death of the cross ; arose from the dead, and, ascending to heaven, was invested with power to superintend the moral concerns of our world ; and finally to raise the human race from the grave, and confer and inflict on them the retributions of a righteous judgment.

The difference between a being of underived existence, and one whose existence is derived, is infinite. This distinction should ever be made between God and his Son, Christ our Saviour.— Though Arians admit that Jesus Christ is exalted in rank, and possessed of power to carry into effect the high purposes above mentioned ; yet they hold that this exalted existence was derived from God ; that the power to execute the commission of Mediator is derived power ; and that the merciful and benevolent design accomplished by the ministry of the Saviour had its origin in the goodness of the one living and true God. On God, therefore, our minds should rest as the original author of all blessings, and as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The character and station of Christ I shall now endeavour to discuss under the following propositions.

1. The proof from scripture, that our Saviour existed in heaven before his appearance on earth.
2. The proof from scripture, that the appearance of our Saviour on earth was an act of humiliation and debasement.
3. The power and majesty which the scriptures attribute to Christ, in carrying into execution the

purposes of divine mercy, in the salvation of man, are inconsistent with the supposition of his mere humanity.

1. The proof from Scripture, that our Saviour existed in heaven before his appearance on earth.

The apostle Paul, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Colossians, speaks of our Saviour in the following language—"Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature." The Greek word here translated, first born of every creature, in its original sense is, I believe, applied to the first born child of a family. If the apostle uses it in this sense, it must mean, that of all created beings Jesus Christ was the first. St. John's description of the character of Christ comports with this meaning—"The beginning of the creation of God." An apostle also declares, that "He is before all things." Hear the language of our Saviour himself on the subject before us, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am. No man ascendeth up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who was in heaven. What if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?" Would not a discerning, unbiassed mind understand these passages, and others like them, as expressing the existence of our Saviour in heaven, before he appeared on earth, in fashion as a man? Is not this their obvious meaning? Take one more passage from our Saviour himself, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."—

This is a solemn act of devotion in prayer, in which we least expect to find figurative language. Jesus had glorified the name of God on earth, and had finished the work given him to do ; and in a devout address to Deity, he prays that God would re-admit him to that glory which he possessed in the divine presence before the creation of the world. Will the several passages I have recited, and the many texts which speak of Christ as coming from God, and returning to God ; descending from heaven, and again ascending to the place from whence he came, bear without violence the Humanitarian construction ? But for the present, I am disposed to admit them in their full force. Let it then be granted, that, the first born of every creature, the first creation of God, he was before all things, and all similar descriptions of the character of Christ mean only that Jesus Christ is pre-eminent among all the agents whom God has commissioned to be his instruments in the execution of the divine purposes of grace and mercy. Admit that the declaration, “Before Abraham was, I am,” was the answer of Jesus to a captious question of the Jews, who refused to be instructed by him, and perverted all his observations. Allow that Jesus did not say that he had seen Abraham, but that the mind of Abraham was opened to a view of the blessings of the reign of Messiah. Admit that ascending to heaven, as no man hath ascended to heaven but the Son of Man, means that no one but the Son had been, as he was, made acquainted with the counsels of God ; and that in the language of scripture, what God determines to bring to

pass, is represented as actually accomplished ; and therefore the glory which Christ had with God, before the world was, means the honour which in the purpose of God was fixed as the reward of his obedience unto death. Admit, further, that the bold and figurative language of St. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians--"By him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers ; all things were created by him, and for him," is not to be understood as the creation of natural substances, but the creation of a new moral kingdom in accordance with the prediction of the prophet, that a new heaven and a new earth should be created. Admit that the creation, which the apostle here ascribes to Christ, expresses that great change which was introduced into the moral world, and particularly into the relative situation of Jew and Gentile, by the dispensation of the gospel. Though the obvious meaning of most of the above passages will with difficulty bear this construction, yet, were the language of scripture on other points accordant, I could consistently adopt them ; but before I embrace this doctrine, and reject the supposition of the pre-existence of our Saviour, I must surmount greater difficulties than those which are presented by that class of texts already recited. Let us then,

2. Examine the proofs from scripture, that the appearance of Jesus Christ on earth was an act of humiliation and debasement.

If the pre-existence of Christ be denied, in what manner did he humble himself by his earthly ap-

pearance ? What do the sacred writers mean, where they speak of his divesting himself of riches, that we by his poverty might be made rich ? Hear the expressions of the apostles of our Lord—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you, through his poverty might be rich." This is figurative language ; but could it have been taken from the circumstances of the life of our Saviour on earth ? His birth was obscure, his minority was spent in a laborious occupation ; and in manhood he had not a house in which to dwell, nor income from which to draw support. What wealth then in this condition did he renounce ? The Humanitarian comment is, that though invested with divine powers, he consented to lead a life of want, and he never performed a miracle for his own relief. But when did he divest himself of these powers ? Admit his pre-existence in a state of honour and happiness, and the observations of the apostle have great pertinence and force. From benevolence Christ descended from heaven, and subjected himself to a condition of poverty and suffering, that by his ministry he might redeem you from your moral debasement, exalt you to the highest virtues and graces of true religion, and raise you to an heavenly inheritance which will be incorruptible.

In the 2d chapter to the Philippians, St. Paul exhorts his correspondents to humility and benevolence, from the example of Christ, "Who," the apostle adds, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took on himself the

form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Waving criticism on the import of a Greek phrase used in this passage, can we rest satisfied with the opinion of those, who suppose that it means no more than this:—Christ, though possessed of miraculous powers, exercised them only in giving proof of his divine mission; and in his poverty and distress, declined this exercise for his personal relief; or, that when he was arraigned, and during the time of his passion, he divested himself of them? On the contrary, can we understand the exhortation of the apostle in a sense short of this:—Be ye humble and benevolent like your Divine Master, who, being in a station of honour and dignity, was not solicitous to retain his station, but voluntarily descended from it, and took the lowest condition of man; and for the benefit of the human race, endured poverty and persecution even to the death of the cross? In this sense, how powerfully is the motive thus arising to humbleness of mind and benevolence of conduct enforced on all Christians!

I proceed,

3. To consider the power and majesty which the scriptures attribute to Christ in carrying into execution the purposes of divine mercy in the salvation of man; and to inquire whether these are consistent with the supposition of his mere humanity.

Under this head, I might mention the lofty language of the prophet, when describing the advent of Immanuel into our world.—“Unto us a child is

born, unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be on his shoulder ; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." Is this the description of a mere man ? His character is here given in the highest metaphors ; and the blessings of his reign are pourtrayed in emphatick language. He is represented as a wonderful Counsellor, the mighty Lord, the Father of an everlasting age, or the founder of a moral government, the Prince of universal righteousness and peace. Attend to the language in which an angel from heaven announced to Mary, that she should become the mother of the Saviour.—“ The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee ; therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” His birth was also celebrated by the angels of heaven. “ The glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds in the field of Bethlehem ; and the angel of the Lord said unto them, “ Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people ; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord.” The author of the epistle to the Hebrews asserts, “ When he, (that is God) bringeth in the first born into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him.” Can this language be made to comport with the doctrine of the simple humanity of our Saviour ?

To what station of dignity did Jesus Christ ascend, after his resurrection from the grave ? Attend to the information of the inspired penman on this

point. "Wherefore," that is, in consequence of his humiliation and obedience unto death, "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Is not the evident meaning of those animated expressions this—God has exalted his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the head and governour of that world, for whose benefit he made a sacrifice of his life; and that all his disciples owe allegiance to his government, and obedience to his laws, as their common Lord and Master? Similar descriptions will be found in other parts of the New Testament, of the exaltation and power of Jesus Christ. Thus the passages in Colossians which have already been mentioned—"Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature; for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the Church; who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell."

Compare these representations of the person, character, and offices of Jesus Christ, with those made in the bible of Moses, of Peter, of Paul, or any other distinguished prophet or apostle; and

say whether the difference consists merely in the different degree in which a man was invested with divine powers to accomplish the purposes of divine wisdom and mercy. Does not the distinction arise from a higher source? Is not Jesus Christ here spoken of as a being of a more exalted nature, possessing the power of a legislator and governour, and appointed to administer all the concerns of the kingdom of grace and mercy, which he was commissioned to establish on earth?

Under this proposition, we have only to review the general language of the New Testament, respecting the honours to which Jesus Christ has ascended in heaven, the power which he possesses at the right hand of his Father, and the agency he will in future time take in raising men from the sleep of death, and passing judgment upon them. Then we may determine whether this language comports with the Humanitarian doctrine. The information in the New Testament, that Christ will raise the dead, is express.—“ Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. The hour cometh in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation.” The language of scripture on the subject of the final judgment is not less plain and full. “ The Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. In the day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. Then shall appear the sign of the Son of

Man in heaven; and then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his works."

What splendour of imagery do we find in the scriptural representation of the second advent of the Son of God into our world! How sublime and awful is the purpose for which he will appear! He comes encircled with the glory of his Father, and accompanied with the angels of heaven. A trumpet is sounded, which awakes the posterity of Adam from the sleep of death: Jesus ascends the seat of judgment; and before him all nations are assembled. On the righteous he pronounces a sentence, which introduces them to honour, glory, and immortality. The wicked are separated from God, and from happiness; and they are assigned to the place of misery and destruction.

Does this elevated description—do these solemn transactions accord with the character of a mere man? With a man the most distinguished and exalted? Is not the Being, whose attendants are angels, whose glory is that of God, whose business is to pronounce judgment on the secrets of every heart, to determine unalterably the moral character of every man, and to apportion to every individual

of the human race the rewards and the punishments of a future state—is not this Being more than man?

Many learned and devout Christians think that the metaphysical character of Christ is not described by the inspired writers. Enough is revealed respecting him for the purpose of our salvation; enough for the exercise of our intellectual faculties, and for a test of our charity; but the full knowledge of the person of our Saviour will be acquired only in a higher state of being.

To conclude.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, after he had described the superiour dignity of Christ, and the higher excellency of his dispensation, draws an inference, which we ought, my Christian brethren, deeply to impress on our minds. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” How aggravated is the guilt of those, who reject the offers of love and mercy made by Jesus Christ, the Son of God! It is to mock the authority of Deity, to slight the proposals of infinite wisdom and infinite goodness, to prefer misery to happiness. From reverence then to the Parent of all Being, from gratitude to a devoted Saviour, from the love of existence and of happiness, let us obey and live.

SERMON IV.

TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE EXPLAINED.

JOHN x. 30.

I and my Father are one.

IN the last discourse, I introduced a number of passages from the New Testament, in which our Saviour, in the plainest language, declares that he is a being distinct from God, and dependent on him for all the power he exercises. In the sacred writings there is no contradiction. My present purpose is to review and explain the principal texts which are adduced to support the Trinitarian doctrine.

Every one who is in any measure acquainted with this subject, must be apprized of its difficulty.—Biblical criticism is often the result of laborious research into the idioms of the languages in which the scriptures were originally written ; into the systems of philosophy, the national customs and private manners prevalent at the respective ages of the sacred writers ; and into the meaning of particular words and phrases found in scripture, as these were commonly used by profane authors. Such researches greatly aid in elucidating the oracles of

truth. But usefully to interweave learned criticisms into a sermon designed for a mixed audience, requires nice discrimination and sound judgment ; and at last much must depend on authority. I labour under some apprehension that I shall not be able to make myself clearly understood by those who are not conversant with these studies. But I rest on the interest we all have in this subject, to ensure a serious and candid attention to the observations which may be made.

Language is necessarily ambiguous. Particular words, and often whole sentences, will bear different meanings. Sometimes, after the closest attention to the main design of an author, it may be impossible to determine the sense of peculiar phrases. In all such instances, the consistent method is, to put a meaning on passages which are obscure that will accord with the undoubted sense of plain passages, and which at the same time will comport with the apparent purpose of the writer. In respect to that class of texts which are adduced as divine authority for the doctrine of the Supreme Divinity of our Saviour, the real question is not, whether these will bear, in accordance with the general principles of language, the construction Trinitarians put on them ; but whether they will not bear the construction of Unitarians ? This, as we believe, agrees with the evident sense of passages the most plain, and is in harmony with the general language of the inspired writers respecting the Unity of God, and the character of Jesus Christ. Bearing in mind the obvious sense of plain passages, and attending to the subject on which the writer treats,

will generally enable us to discover the meaning of the bold metaphors and figurative expressions in which eastern languages abound. Thus our Saviour declares, "Whosoever liveth and believes in me shall never die." Of the sacramental bread he says, "This is my body," and of the wine, "This is my blood." The apostle John observes respecting Christian converts, "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and know all things."—With these and similar texts we find no difficulty. The subject on which the declarations are made, and the evident design of those who made them, enable us to give them their proper limitation, and fully to understand their import.

Before we proceed to the proposed review of particular passages, I will make a few more general observations. In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is not a single text, I believe, on which, by itself, a discerning mind would rely as an authority for the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ. The only passage produced from the three first gospels, as direct proof of the doctrine, by a learned professor of our country, in a late defence of the Trinitarian doctrine, is from Matt. xi. 27—"All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." The comment on this text, by this Trinitarian writer, is—"If in this passage, the same omniscience be not ascribed to the Son as to the Father, I am unable to make out satisfactorily what the meaning of it is. At the same time I concede, that the knowl-

edge here spoken of, may possibly be merely that which is intended to be revealed in the gospel.”—A text more in point cannot be found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. If Christ proclaimed himself, “very God,” is it possible that three evangelists, two of them the immediate disciples of Jesus, and commissioned to be the apostles of Christianity, in recording the publick instructions of their Master, should not have clearly and repeatedly stated this fundamental truth of revelation? A number of passages are found in John’s gospel, which are thought to prove the Supreme Divinity of our Saviour. But if I were to select a book from the New Testament, containing more full proof than any other, that Christ Jesus is not “very God,” it would be the gospel of John. The other gospels are destitute of such proof, and the general language of their authors are not, I think, consistent with the truth of the Trinitarian doctrine; but in the gospel of John, Jesus speaks more particularly of himself, and absolutely disclaims the attributes of Deity.

From the desponding language of the apostles, it is evident, that at the crucifixion of Jesus, they did not suppose that he possessed the perfections of Deity. When were their minds opened to the light of this new doctrine? It must have filled them with astonishment. They no where manifest the surprise which they must have felt at its discovery; nor does it any where appear in their preaching. Peter, in his first sermon, thus addressed his countrymen—“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs,

which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know ; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain : whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." The apostle adds—"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Is the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ here published, as we must suppose it would be, by an apostle whose mind had recently been opened to a view of this most wonderful doctrine ? It does not appear that Peter, when he delivered this sermon, was a Trinitarian.

St. Paul did not personally attend the ministry of Jesus Christ ; nor was he instructed in the Christian system by those, who on earth were conversant with him ; but he was taught the truths pertaining to life eternal by a particular revelation. Let us attend to the manner in which he described the being and attributes of God to a Gentile audience. At Athens, which for science and literature was the most celebrated city of the Pagan world, and on an occasion which led him particularly to this subject, he addressed the most enlightened men among this distinguished people. He had before preached Jesus and the resurrection.

The philosophers arraigned him before their highest tribunal, and demanded an explanation of his doctrine. How favourable was the opportunity to unfold to these inquisitive men the complex na-

ture of the Deity, and to teach them the three distinct persons of the Godhead. What was the address of the Apostle? “Ye men of Athens, as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription—‘To the unknown God.’ Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God, who made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things.” St. Paul thus closes his address—“We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Is there the least notice of a Trinity in this discourse? A single word that has an allusion to the Supreme Divinity of our Saviour?

The Divine Unity was holden as the most sacred truth, by the Jews of the age of our Saviour. The best informed divines, I believe, admit, that the sect of Jewish converts to the Christian faith, denominated Nazarenes, were Unitarians. The Jews having been fully established in the belief of the strict Unity of God, it must have been with difficulty that they were persuaded to adopt the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead; and yet, in the

New Testament, we have no account of any controversy on this subject. Jewish converts were very tenacious of the ceremonial part of their law, and they strove to incorporate it with Christian institutions. Much was written by the apostle to convince them of their error on this point, particularly in the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. But no opposition appears to have been made to the new doctrine of three persons and one God ; nor do we learn that the unbelieving Jews of that time ever objected to Christianity on this ground. Can this be accounted for, but on the supposition that the apostles never taught the doctrine of the Trinity ?

We will now direct our attention to those passages of scripture which are commonly considered as proof of the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ. And that my comments on them may have the greater perspicuity, I shall introduce the review in the following manner :—

1. To consider those texts in which it is asserted, that Christ is mentioned by the appropriate names of God.

2. Those passages, which are said to ascribe to Christ the honour and worship which are due only to God.

3. Those passages, which are supposed to ascribe to Christ the attributes of Supreme Divinity.

The principal texts which speak of Christ, by names appropriated to God, follow. The prophecy of Isaiah is the most remarkable passage that can be found in the Old Testament.—“ For unto us a

child is born, unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be on his shoulders ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.” All commentators acknowledge that this prediction refers to the Messiah, and that these titles are descriptive of his character ; but there has been great dispute respecting the import of the Hebrew terms here used. The name ascribed to the Messiah is the only part of this prophecy which has relation to our present subject.—Wonderful, Counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of peace. The doctrines revealed by our Saviour, and the precepts he inculcated, entitle him to the epithet wonderful Counsellor. The word here translated *God*, biblical criticks inform us, is in some places of the Hebrew scriptures expressive of the Supreme Being, God, and in others is applied to human rulers and magistrates ; and that the proper translation of the term in the passage before us is *Lord*. The miracles of our Saviour being considered, we perceive the propriety of denominating him the *mighty Lord*. The most learned and orthodox commentators concede that *everlasting Father* does not express the sense of the Hebrew text. The literal meaning is, the Father of a future age, or of an endless age ; doubtless meaning the author of the Christian age, the moral kingdom which Christ would establish on earth. *The Prince of peace*.—An epithet clearly descriptive of the nature of the reign or kingdom of the Messiah. A prophet shall arise among men, who shall be wonderful in counsel, and mighty in power ; who shall establish a

moral kingdom, and in whose reign peace shall abound. This is a remarkable description of the character of our Saviour, and of his holy and peaceable religion; but I cannot perceive that it contains any proof of the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ.

The texts under our present consideration are generally taken from the New Testament. In Matthew, 1st chapter, 23d verse, we read—"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name *Emmanuel*, which, being interpreted, is, *God with us*. Admit that this text, as it stands in the prophecy of Isaiah, refers to our Saviour; yet it proves not the doctrine which it is produced to support. It was a common custom among the Jews to give their children names of similar import. The literal meaning of the name Ismael is, *God who hears*—of Lemuel, *God with them*—of Elijah, *God the Lord*—of Elisha, *Salvation of God*—of Elihu, *He is my God himself*, &c. The literal meaning of Emmanuel, therefore, cannot be considered as evidence that Jesus Christ is very God. For this reason I observed, that there was not a single text in Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, on which a learned Trinitarian would choose to rest his doctrine.

The first of St. John's gospel is by many thought to contain full proof of the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ.—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It is very doubtful whether *we* have any correct idea of the Greek term here translated *the Word*, as it was used in the age of the apostle John. Divines,

eminent for their learning, and for their critical knowledge of the language of the sacred writers, suppose that the apostle, in this place, has personified the wisdom of God.—See the 8th chapter of Proverbs. But, grant that in this passage it refers to the person of our Saviour, still it must be conceded that the person who was with God, is a being distinct from God himself; and when this being is called God, the meaning must be, that he stood, for a particular purpose, in the place of God, and acted under the divine authority. If we are unable fully to understand this difficult text, we clearly ought not to make it an authority for a doctrine, which, to our understanding, involves a plain contradiction, and is opposed to the general language of scripture on the Unity of God.

Our text will, perhaps, be introduced in this class of passages.—“I and my Father are one.” In the previous verses, our Saviour had given an assurance to his disciples, that none who believed in him should perish, but all should receive eternal life. To strengthen their confidence in his promise, he informed them that God had engaged to carry into effect the assurance he had given.—“My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man will be able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” In this very discourse, Jesus declares his inferiority to his Father. The unity asserted is not identity of the Father and the Son, but unity of design and agency. God and Christ are united to effectuate the promise of salvation to all believers. That we are correct in this meaning of our text, will more fully appear, when we attend to

similar phraseology respecting the union of Christ and his disciples. Our Saviour in prayer adopts this expression—"The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected in one." The gender in this place is not, in the original, masculine, but neuter; not one being, but one design. God and Christ, in promoting the interests of truth, goodness, and mercy, are united in purpose, and in their agency.

The exclamation of St. Thomas has often been adduced as proof that Jesus Christ is "very God." This is the only instance in the New Testament in which any disciple addressed our Lord by the title God. At the death of our Saviour, all his disciples desponded. Thomas did not credit the report of his resurrection; and at the sight of him alive, in astonishment he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." The word God, we know, was often used by the Jews in a subordinate sense. Can this exclamation be understood in any other sense than an animated acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as a divine Teacher, as the Messiah of God?

The charge of St. Paul to the elders of the Ephesian Church is numbered among the texts which we are reviewing.—"Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." The word God, in this passage, refers to Christ. It is the only place in the New Testament where this phrase, *the blood of God*, occurs. A diligent examination of ancient Greek manuscripts,

and of different versions of the scriptures, makes it in the highest degree probable, that the word originally written was *Lord*.—"Feed the Church of the Lord, (Christ) which he has purchased with his own blood." The blood of Christ is more accordant with the general language of the sacred writers. This amendment admitted, the text will no longer be produced as evidence to prove that Jesus Christ is God.

In Romans, 9th chapter, 3d verse, it is written—"Whose are the fathers, and of whom concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forevermore." The meaning of this passage probably has been misapprehended in consequence of its bad punctuation and collocation. The improved version of the New Testament gives the passage thus—"Whose are the Fathers, and of whom, by natural descent, Christ came. God over all be blessed forever." The original Greek manuscripts were not divided into chapters and verses, as the printed copies of the bible now are; and the punctuation varies in different translations. The learned and pious Dr. Samuel Clarke, and the great Mr. Locke, add their sanction to the above construction of this text. One statement in this passage clearly shows that St. Paul did not consider Jesus Christ to be the Supreme Divinity; for he says, concerning the flesh, Jesus descended from the Jews. He cannot then be God.

I will now bring into view the text from 1 Tim. 3d chapter, 16th verse—"Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels,

preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Instead of *God* in this place, the best manuscripts have, *he who*, and the passage in the improved version reads as follows—"Without controversy the mystery of godliness is great : He, who was manifest in the flesh, was justified by the spirit, seen by (angels) messengers, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received into glory." By angels in this place, we may understand the apostles whom Jesus instructed to be his messengers to the nations.—The Greek word in the original, may with equal propriety be translated messenger, and angel.

The last text of this class, that I shall introduce, is from Hebrews i. 8.—"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever ; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." Learned commentators inform us, that this passage may with strict propriety be thus translated—"But unto the Son he said, God is thy throne ;" giving assurance that the kingdom of the Messiah is supported by the power of God. The passage is quoted from the 45th Psalm ; and there it appears to be an address of the psalmist to Jehovah. Taken in this sense, as used by St. Paul, the text has great beauty and force. We understand the apostle as showing the stability of Christ's kingdom, by declaring after the psalmist, that God is its support ; and that this God is eternal, the same that "in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth," &c. But admitting that the word God, in this place, refers to Jesus Christ, it evidently cannot be descriptive of him as the Supreme God ; for in the

verse which immediately succeeds, a reward is promised to the Son from the Father—"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." That being cannot be the Supreme God, to whom it is said, God, even thy God, shall reward thee.

I proceed,

2. To examine those passages of scripture which are supposed to ascribe to Jesus Christ the honour and worship which are due only to God.

Worship does not always in the scriptures signify the reverence and homage due to God only; but frequently inferiour respect and obeisance.—Thus we read that Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, and worshipped Daniel. In the day of Solomon, all the congregation bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the king. In the New Testament it is recorded, Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter, and worshipped him. With these remarks, I will present to your consideration the most select passages in which honour and worship are ascribed to Jesus Christ. John's gospel, v. 23—"That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent him." In the previous verses we are informed, that the Father had commissioned the Son to raise the dead, and to judge the world; the text quoted follows as an inference, that all men might honour the Son as they honour the Father—not offer to him supreme worship; but honour him as the authorized minister of God, in the same manner as the ambassador

of a foreign government is honoured, as the government with whose authority he is clothed is honoured.

The text in Hebrews, 1st chapter, 6th verse, is considered by many to warrant the supreme worship of our Saviour.—“When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.” The phraseology in this passage does not imply the religious worship we offer to God. The language is, When he bringeth him in—that is, when at the fulness of time, Christ, by divine appointment, commenced the high purposes of the office of Mediator, God said, Let all the subordinate ministers of the moral kingdom which he is about to establish on earth, reverence him, who alone has power to legislate and rule in it.

Among this class of texts the passage from Phil. ii. 10, 11, is quoted.—“That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” It is, I apprehend, a strained construction of this text, to make it an authority for the supreme worship of Jesus Christ. Christ had humbled himself, and on earth had been obedient to the divine will unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore, says the apostle, God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. It is at this name, to which God has exalted him, that every knee is to bow: it is to honour bestowed by

a higher being, and bestowed as a reward for obedience, not to underived excellence, that submission is to be yielded; and the principal glory does not rest with the Son thus exalted, but centres in the Father who honoured him.—“That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” As the reward of Christ’s official labours and sacrifices on earth, he is exalted to be the head of the Church, and all its members owe him allegiance and homage.

The invocation of Stephen to Christ, is thought to be an instance of supreme worship. Acts vii. 59, 60—“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” It pleased God to support Stephen, the first Christian martyr, by a vision of our Saviour, as we learn from the previous verses. Having Jesus in his immediate view, to him he commended his departing spirit. This extraordinary instance, I believe, is not set as an example for the supreme worship of Christ, who to us is invisible.

Before I close, I shall review one text, which is supposed to ascribe to Jesus Christ the attributes of the Supreme Divinity.

The following passage from the Revelation of St. John, is produced as proof of the omniscience of Jesus Christ. Chapter 2d, verse 23d.—“All the Churches shall know that I am he, who searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” The evidence from this passage is thought to receive strength, when

connected with the ascription of Solomon to the one true God. “Thou only knowest the hearts of men.” Solomon, in the most explicit manner, testifies that God only knows the hearts of men. St. John, speaking in the name of his ascended Lord, declares—“All the Churches shall know that I am he, who searcheth the reins and the hearts, and will render to every one of you according to your works;” therefore, it is inferred, Christ is very God. But few comments, I think, are necessary to show the true meaning of these passages, and make it apparent that they furnish no proof that Christ possesses omniscience which is the attribute of Deity. God possesses knowledge and all other perfections in a manner peculiar to himself. Jesus Christ does not assume to himself knowledge, or any other attribute, in that high and underived sense in which he attributes them to God. On the contrary, with the greatest solemnity he declares his dependence.—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself.” In this address to the Churches, we are guarded against misapprehending the knowledge and power exercised by Jesus Christ, in searching the hearts and passing judgment on the characters of men, by an express declaration that he received these from God—“even as I received of my Father.”—(27th verse.) I try the characters of men, and reward them according to their works, “even as I received of my Father.”

The inspired penmen say, that God only has immortality. No other being is possessed of independent and immortal existence; but God grants eternal life to his dutiful children. God alone

knows the secrets of the heart, as an underived and essential attribute of his nature ; Christ possesses the knowledge of men's hearts by a derived capacity. God, who breathed into us the breath of life, has by his inspiration imbued an apostle with power to know the thoughts of the heart. St. Peter knew the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts v.

The advocates for the doctrine of the Trinity produce other passages from scripture, to prove that Christ is possessed of divine attributes, and is very God. But if authority be not found in the texts recited, few, I believe, will contend that this article of faith is found in the New Testament.

SERMON V.

THE SCRIPTURAL MEANING OF THE TERMS, HOLY GHOST,
HOLY SPIRIT, AND SPIRIT OF GOD.

JOHN xiv. 26.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

THE advocates for the doctrine of the Trinity, both in ancient and modern times, greatly differ in their attempts to explain it. The earlier polemick writers on this subject, represent that the Son and the Holy Ghost derived their attributes from the Father, and are subordinate to him. Some of the English Divines describe the three persons of the Trinity as three modes or relations, which Deity bears towards men. One eminent theologian of that nation, says, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are as really distinct persons, as the apostles Peter, James, and John; and another observes, respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, "Were it not adored as a mystery, it would be exploded as a contradiction." A professor of our

own country tells us, that the term person, when applied to the Trinity, should not be understood in its common acceptation ; and informs us that it means a distinction in the Godhead which cannot be explained ; but he ascribes personal attributes to the Son, and in every part of his publication speaks of him as a person ; and unless the word be taken in its usual sense, his arguments will not easily be comprehended.

It is worthy of remark, that Trinitarian writers take slight notice of the proof from scripture of the independent existence, and of the equality of the Holy Ghost with the Father. Few will assert, I believe, that the bible contains the record of divine worship being offered by inspired men to the Holy Ghost, or that the Holy Spirit is presented by the sacred writers as the object of our worship. In the revelation of the New Testament, no duty to the Holy Ghost is enjoined which men are to perform. We are neither commanded to love or to fear, to honour or obey him ; nor to exercise towards him any devout affection. The attentive reader of scripture will perceive the different language of evangelists and apostles respecting religious obligations towards our God, our Saviour, and the Holy Ghost. The texts, which by any method of construction can be adduced to prove that the Holy Ghost is possessed of underived existence, and of the essential attributes of Divinity, are so few in number, and of such doubtful meaning, that no one, I believe, would be willing to rest the truth of the doctrine on these exclusively. The usual course is to state the Trinitarian dogma as a revealed truth, to

produce texts which are thought to prove the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ, and to consider the Divinity of the Spirit as a necessary consequence. But surely the converse of the proposition is more logical and conclusive. If the Supreme Divinity of the third person in the Godhead be not proved, the doctrine manifestly is not scriptural. That we may form a correct opinion of the Trinitarian doctrine respecting the Holy Ghost, as it is generally embraced, I will recite it in the language of an article of a distinguished Church.—“The Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son, of one substance, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.” We are told that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity. No language like this is found in the bible. For such descriptions of Deity we must peruse the systems of school divinity.

The purpose of the present discourse is to point out the meaning of the sacred writers in the use of the terms, Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and simply the Spirit.

I present this important subject, my Christian brethren, to your serious and candid attention, under the following propositions:—

1. The manner in which the inspired writers use the term Spirit, or Holy Spirit, in immediate connexion with God.

2. When the phrases, Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, have a direct reference to Jesus Christ.

3. When these have a special reference to the apostles of our Divine Lord.

4. When these are applied to Christian professors generally, and refer to their progress in moral life.

5. When the inspired writers speak of the Holy Ghost as a person or agent.

From these several propositions, you will perceive that the term Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, is used in the bible in different senses ; and its true meaning can be discovered only by an examination of the particular places where it is found. These I shall recite as I find them collected by the indefatigable Dr. Lardner, and those who have followed him in this inquiry.

1. The manner in which the inspired writers use the term Spirit, or Holy Spirit, in immediate connexion with God.

In every place, as well in the New Testament as the Old, where the term Spirit, or Holy Spirit is used in this connexion, it signifies either God himself, or some essential attribute of God, or the peculiar manifestation of the power of God. The psalmist observes, (Ps. 139)—“ Whither shall I go from thy spirit ?” It immediately follows—“ If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there.” By spirit, in this passage, therefore, we must understand the presence of God, or God himself. Elihu, the friend of Job, declares—“ The spirit of God made me.” God created him. Isaiah, speaking of the perverseness of the Israelites, in their disobedience to the commands of God, says, (chap. lxiii. 10)—“ They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit.” Describing

the same rebellion, God said to Moses, (Num. xiv. 11)—“How long will this people provoke me.” And the psalmist, rehearsing the same transactions, observes, (Ps. lxxviii. 56)—“They tempted and provoked the most high God.” (Ps. xcv. 9)—“Your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.” To tempt or provoke the Holy Spirit of God, then, in the language of the Old Testament, is to tempt or provoke God himself.

The power of God, the word, the spirit, the strength, the majesty, the hands of God, are all expressions used in the Old Testament to describe the agency of God. Take an example from a learned commentator,—“In one of the eloquent replies of Job (xxvi. 12, 13) a remarkable instance occurs, in which, speaking of the majesty of God and his wonderful works, the turn of expression is varied four times, without changing the meaning in a single sentence. ‘He divided the sea by his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud; by his *spirit* he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.’ The intelligent reader understands the same divine operations to be expressed, and not four distinct persons to be intimated by the several terms power, understanding, spirit, and hands.” The prophet Micah inquires, (ii. 7)—“Is the spirit of the Lord straitened?” And Isaiah asserts, (lix. 1)—“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.” Micah, by the spirit of the Lord, expresses the same truth, which Isaiah does by the hand of the Lord: they both mean the power of the one living and true God.

We find similar modes of expression in the New Testament. St. Paul declares—"The things of God knoweth no one, but the spirit of God," meaning God himself, as fully appears from a similar phraseology in a different connexion. The apostle frequently speaks of the spirit of a man, where he evidently means the man himself.—"I am glad (said Paul to the Corinthians) of the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaiacus; for they have refreshed my spirit and yours." They have refreshed me and you. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit." That is, be with you. "What man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of a man that is in him?" (1 Corinth. ii. 11) By the spirit of man, in this place, we must understand the man himself. It immediately follows—"Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God." By the spirit of God, then, we must understand God himself. When the apostle Peter reprimanded Ananias and Sapphira, he asked them—"How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the spirit of the Lord?" Peter addressing those who endeavoured to impose the Mosaic ceremonies on Christian converts, says, (Acts, xv. 10)—"Now, therefore, why tempt ye God?" Matthew states a remark of our Saviour to the Jews, in the following words, (chap. xii)—"If I cast out devils by the spirit of God, then is the kingdom of God come nigh unto you." Luke, narrating the same conversation, gives the remark as follows, (xi. 20)—"If I, with the finger of God, cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come

upon you." By the words spirit and finger, the evangelists mean the power of God. Other passages might be produced; but these are sufficient to show, that when the Spirit, or Holy Spirit, is used in immediate connexion with God, the term implies either God himself, or some attribute or particular agency of the one true God.

2. We are now to review those passages of scripture in which the inspired writers use the term Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, in reference to Jesus Christ.

As the first example, I select a remarkable prediction of the prophet Isaiah, respecting the Messiah, (xi. 1)—"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord." It is not here predicted that the Messiah should hold communication with the Holy Spirit, as a person distinct from God, and should be instructed, guided, and supported by this independent spirit; but the prediction is, that the spirit of God, the one true God, shall rest upon him. The prophet defines the properties or qualifications with which he shall be embued, viz. wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge, and the reverence of Deity: in a word, all the qualifications necessary for the high purposes of his mission, as the ambassador of God, and the Saviour of sinners. When we examine the New Testament, we find its language on our subject in harmony with this prediction. At the

baptism of Jesus by John, the evangelist informs us (Matt. iii. 16)—“Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.” The language of St. Luke, in his account of this baptism, is a little different, (Luke, iii. 22)—“It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him.” St. John’s phraseology, in his relation of this event, varies from each of the former, (John i. 32)—“And John (the Baptist) bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.” No one will suppose that the descent, denominated by the evangelists, the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, and simply the Spirit, was a person lighting and abiding on Jesus. This descent of the Spirit was a visible sign from heaven, that Jesus was divinely qualified to execute the office of Mediator; and a voice accompanied the symbol, proclaiming—“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The voice, it will be acknowledged, was from the Father; and why should we doubt that the token was from the being uttering the voice? The inspired writers speak of Christ possessing the Holy Spirit, in the following manner—“Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan. Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. He whom God has sent, speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him.” All these passages

are descriptive of the extraordinary powers, by which our Saviour was qualified to execute the commission he received from the Father of Mercies, for the salvation of men. In no one of these texts do we find any proof of the independent existence of a spirit distinct from the Father, and possessing the attributes of Supreme Divinity.

3. Permit me to direct your attention to the meaning of the sacred writers, in the use of the term Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, in immediate reference to the apostles of our Divine Lord.

In our text, and in other places, our Saviour promises the apostles, that the Holy Ghost should be given them. By a careful perusal of the book of Acts, we learn what they received, and therefore may understand the import of the promise. John, indeed, in some measure explains the gift promised, (vii. 39)—“But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” By this mode of expression, John cannot mean, by the Holy Ghost, a person: he evidently describes some qualification or power, which would be bestowed on the apostles. The same promise, given by our Saviour in more familiar language, will also assist us in forming an opinion of the meaning of the term Holy Ghost, in the passage of John. Jesus, addressing his disciples, said, (Luke xxiv. 49)—“Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” In the introduction to the his-

tory of the preaching of the apostles among the Gentiles, the circumstances of our Saviour's ministry are summarily recapitulated, and the promise of the Holy Ghost is thus stated, (Acts i. 5)—“John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” In the next chapter we have the manner in which the promise was fulfilled—“When the day of pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting; and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.” Peter, soon after he had received the Holy Ghost, miraculously healed a man lame from his birth, and so effectually preached the gospel, that in one day three thousand souls were added to the Christian Church. When the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles, we then perceive, they received the gift of tongues, the power to work miracles, and knowledge to teach the truths pertaining to eternal life. The qualifications received were the blessings promised. The splendour of circumstances attending the endowment of the apostles with these qualifications, corresponded with the wonderful powers with which they were invested. The apostles themselves were not only imbued with these extraordinary faculties; but power was also given to them to impart to other converts, at least to evangelists, pastors, and teachers, the gift of tongues

and other extraordinary attributes. When Peter preached to Cornelius and other Gentiles, the Holy Ghost fell on them that heard the word ; and they of the circumcision, which believed, were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost ; for they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." Paul, on his conversion to Christianity, received the Holy Ghost by the imposition of the hands of Ananias ; and from this time we find him exercising the extraordinary powers of an apostle. " When Paul laid his hands upon them, (the converts of Ephesus,) the Holy Ghost came on them ; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan disciples, " And they received the Holy Ghost." Simon, the sorcerer, offered these apostles money, " saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." Many other texts might be cited from the New Testament, under this branch of our subject, but it is not necessary. I have selected the most important, and these are sufficient to illustrate the scriptural meaning of the term Holy Ghost, and Holy Spirit, when it is used in peculiar reference to the apostles.

4. Let us review these passages of scripture, in which the term Spirit, Spirit of God, and Holy Ghost, are applied to Christians in common, and in connexion with their progress in moral life.

These terms are all used in the bible, to express the means with which God has been pleased to favour men, to enlighten their minds and improve

their dispositions. They embrace all the measures adopted, and the influences afforded in the moral government of God, to assist men in acquiring the knowledge of religious truth, and obtaining the qualifications of a religious character. Stephen, the martyr, rebuked the Jews of his day, for rejecting the counsel of God.—“Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye.” The resistance here mentioned, was to all the measures contained in the dispensation of Moses, and in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul uses this phraseology, (Rom. viii. 14)—“As many as are led by the spirit of God are the sons of God.”—Under divine influence, men are formed to a resemblance of the divine character. In the same chapter, he informs us, (ver. 26) that—“the Spirit helpeth our infirmities.” God grants us assistance in the concerns of moral life. This class of texts is very numerous in the New Testament; but their connexion points out their meaning, and they are without difficulty understood. Few ever select these texts as proof of the Trinitarian doctrine.

I proceed,

5. To consider those passages of scripture in which the Holy Ghost is spoken of as a person or agent.

Our text is one of the most expressive of these. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” The meaning of our Saviour, in this passage, we have already discovered, by attending to the ac-

complishment of the promise, when the apostles received the Holy Ghost. In other places, our Saviour speaks of sending the Comforter, (John, xvi. 7)—“If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. Howbeit, (ver. 13,) when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth ; for he shall not speak of himself ; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak ; and he will show you things to come.” From these passages, we perceive that the Comforter was sent, that he spoke not from himself, but as he was instructed. Surely this is not language that can be applied to a being of independent existence, underived power, and in all divine attributes equal with the Father. The promise of our Saviour, to send the Comforter to his disciples, is fully explained to us, by learning what gifts were bestowed on the apostles at the pentecost. This explanation also teaches us the true meaning of the expressions of Jesus in the last quotation. They are bold figures of speech, which are common in all language, but in which dialects of eastern countries abound. We shall clearly understand their import, when we attend to the manner in which the apostles, desponding at the death of their Master, were comforted by his resurrection ; and reflect on the extraordinary powers with which they were endowed after his ascension. Similar personifications are frequently found in the sacred writings. Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, gives to wisdom personal attributes, and represents her as exercising an extensive agency. St. Paul, in a

most impressive manner, personifies sin and death ; and he has beautifully described charity in the active display of all Christian graces. When you, my Christian brethren, fully understand the personification of wisdom and charity, can you find difficulty in understanding the personification of the spirit, by which the apostles were endued with the gift of tongues, the power to work miracles, and the knowledge of all religious truth ? In the New Testament we are informed, that “the Spirit knoweth all things, searcheth even the deep things of God, and revealeth them to men.” We are directed not to “grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” We are informed that the Spirit was taught, and that he teacheth. In the New Testament we also read “that death reigns, that the law speaks, that the scriptures preach, and that charity believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things.” We readily perceive the meaning of one class of these texts : why, by the same principle of construction, do we not perceive the true meaning of the other ?

When the inspired writers speak of the Holy Spirit in simple language, they do not represent a person with whom men hold communion ; but they describe qualifications or powers, with which Christ and his apostles were in a greater or less degree endowed ; or, the Holy Ghost is spoken of as a quality, a favour, or a blessing, given, granted, poured out, or in which Christians participated.

There are other senses in which the Spirit of God, or simply Spirit, are used in the bible. In the Old Testament, men of mechanical ingenuity

are said to possess the spirit of God. In the construction of the tabernacle, Bezaleel is said to have been filled with the spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. In the New Testament, spirit is used to express the moral efficacy of the gospel, when contrasted with the letter of the Mosaic ceremonies. But on such passages I need not dwell.

I ask Trinitarians to give a meaning to two plain and express declarations of our Saviour, in consistency with their scheme.—“All things are delivered unto me of my Father,” says Christ, (Matt. xi. 27,) “And no one knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”* If the Holy Ghost possesses independent existence, and is omniscient like the Father, could Jesus have made this declaration? In another place our Saviour, predicting a particular event, says, (Matt. xxiv. 36)—“Of that day and hour knoweth no one, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” The comment on all passages which express the inferiority of the Son is, these refer to the human nature of Christ. But this comment will not be applied in the instance before us. No one will affirm that the Holy Ghost is clothed with humanity. If the Holy Ghost be a real person, omniscient and equal with the Father, in what sense shall we understand the declaration that the Father only knoweth that day and hour?

* In the English translation, it is rendered *no man* knoweth, &c.—The original Greek is not thus limited: it is, no one, no being.

You, probably, my Christian brethren, have taken notice that I have not brought into view the passage in the epistle of John (1 John v. 7)—“There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” This text is not found in the authentick Greek manuscripts: it is not contained in the writings of the Christian fathers. In the dispute between the Trinitarians and Arians of the fourth century, this text is not quoted, though the previous and subsequent verses are. It was not included in Luther’s German bible, nor in the first edition of Erasmus’s translation of the New Testament. In Cranmer’s English bible, published in the reign of Henry the VIIIth, this text is included in crotchets, and is printed on a smaller type than the text. Learned Trinitarians of the present day, I believe, admit that it is an interpolation.

Before I close, it may be expected that I consider the form of baptism appointed by our Saviour, (Matt. xxviii. 19.)—“Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” To be baptized in the name of a divine teacher, is to be made his disciple, or to be constituted a nominal professor of his religion. St. Paul observes that the Israelites (1 Cor. x. 2) “were all baptized unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea.” By the various measures adopted with them during their exit from Egypt, and their journies in the wilderness, they were established in the religion of Moses. The proselytes to Judaism from Gentile nations, at a subsequent period, were also baptized unto Moses. At every period of their his-

tory, the Jews were accustomed to introduce Pagan converts to the privileges of their national worship, by the rite of baptism. Converts from Judaism and from idolatry to the belief of the gospel, were baptized in the name of Christ. By this rite they were initiated into his religion, became his nominal disciples, and gained a title to all the privileges of his institution. Christian baptism, in itself, is not an act of worship ; but it is a ceremony by which men are made Christian professors. This rite is solemnly administered to men, when they are seriously disposed to take on themselves the name of Christ, and give a pledge of obedience to his commands, that they may be entitled to the consolations and hopes of his gospel. The import of the form of baptism contained in Matthew, I conceive to be this:—You are now initiated into that religion which proceeded from God, was promulgated by the mediation and ministry of Christ, and was confirmed by the Holy Ghost ; that is, by miracles, which were a seal enstamped by heaven on its truth. The apostles did not consider this form essential to baptism. The disciples of Samaria “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts viii. 16) Paul says, that he and his fellow disciples were baptized into Christ ; and he observes, That as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

In conclusion.

From the review of scripture which we have taken, we find no proof of the existence of an eternal Spirit distinct from God, possessing the attributes of Supreme Divinity, and very God. The

terms Spirit and Holy Spirit, when used in immediate connexion with Deity, mean either God himself, his universal presence through all his works, or the manifestation of some attribute of his nature. When the phrases Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, Spirit of God, are used in reference to Jesus Christ, they mean those communications and endowments from God, which qualified him for the office of Mediator, and enabled him to do the works, teach the doctrines, and accomplish the merciful purposes of the Father. When these terms have reference to the apostles of our Lord, they mean the gift of tongues, the power to work miracles, and the inspiration necessary for the execution of their commission as ambassadors of Christ. When these terms have reference to Christians in common, they imply those moral means and moral influences which God graciously grants men in the business of their salvation. To make the deeper impressions on the human mind, the sacred writers sometimes personify the spirit, as they do wisdom, sin, death, and charity.

From the bible we have equal authority to ascribe personal existence, and all the attributes of Supreme Divinity to the wisdom, to the power, and to the providence of God, as to the Spirit of God.

SERMON VI.

THE PRIMITIVE STATE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

TITUS i. 5.

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain Elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.

FROM this text I shall, my Christian brethren, direct your attention to the primitive state of the Christian Church, and present to your consideration the causes which introduced the superstitions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy. And this discourse is designed as an introduction to a review of the great event that took place in the sixteenth century, which is emphatically styled *the Reformation*.

To the reformation, appeals are often made, the principles and doctrines of the reformers are frequently quoted as authority ; and some probably talk zealously on this subject who do not fully understand it. A succinct history of that important event, I conceive must be generally instructive and useful, if composed in a manner suited to the pulpit, and adapted to the minds of a mixed audience. Relying on your candour, this task I shall attempt.

Before we enter on this extensive subject, however, I would premise one general observation, to prevent censorious judgment respecting those who differ from us in their ecclesiastical constitutions and their forms of publick worship. We have an unquestionable right to place the corruptions and abuses of all denominations in the strongest light, that they may be avoided; but we have no authority to judge and condemn the persons of men. To his own master every servant must account. Christianity was designed to be an universal religion; and in its constitution and general principles it is fitted for this purpose. The Divine Author left nations and communities of men at liberty to adapt external forms to the state of society, to the nature of civil government, and to the general improvement of particular ages and countries. In every communion, the sincere worshipper will be accepted. Indeed, no individual of the human family, as I verily believe, is necessarily excluded from the acceptable service of his Maker; and without sincerity no one will find acceptance. Hear the language of an enlightened and liberal divine of the English Church on this point.—“ Though your Church was pure, without spot or imperfection, yet if your heart is not turned to God, the worship is hateful, and the prayers are an abomination. The homage of the darkest Pagan, worshipping, he knows not what, but still worshipping the unknown power that formed him—if he bows with humility, if he praises with gratitude, his homage will ascend grateful to heaven; while the dead, careless formality of prayer, offered up in

the proudest Christian temple, shall be rejected as an offering unholy. For, think you that the Almighty esteems names and sects? No: it is the heart that he requires: it is the heart alone that he accepts; and much consolation does this afford to the contemplative mind of man. We may be very ignorant in spiritual matters, if the ignorance cannot be removed, and yet may be very safe.—We may not know in what words to clothe our desires in prayer, or where to find language worthy of being presented to the Majesty of Heaven. But amidst the clouds that surround us, here is our comfort—in every nation he that worshippeth in humility, worshippeth aright: he that praiseth with gratitude, praiseth well. The pride of establishments may despise him, but the wisdom and the righteousness of Heaven will hear and approve him.”

Our general subject I shall consider under the following propositions:—

1. The primitive state of the Christian Church.
2. The manner in which ecclesiastical power and dominion were gradually assumed by the Christian priesthood.
3. The rise and extent of the usurpation of the Bishop of Rome; and the corruptions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy.
4. The causes which produced the separation of Protestants from the Romish Church; and the nature and extent of the Reformation.
5. The duty of Protestants to act in consistency with their avowed principles, and to make progres-

sive improvements in religious knowledge and attainments in Christian virtue, corresponding with the light and the means of the age in which they live.

1. The primitive state of the Christian Church.

We cannot conceive of a system more pure and spiritual than the religion of Jesus Christ, as it is found in the New Testament. The instructions of the gospel are fitted to elevate the minds of men by the knowledge of truths the most important: its precepts are calculated to purify their affections, and in the best manner to regulate their practice; and its general influence is great and powerful to form them to the requisite disposition for the highest intellectual and moral enjoyments of which their natures are capable. The doctrines of the Christian revelation, by teaching us the goodness and the mercy of our God, assuring a pardon to the penitent sinner, giving the promise of divine favour to all who do the divine will, and opening to our expectation the glories of immortality, furnish the most persuasive motives to the cultivation of the spirit, and to the exercise of the graces which the gospel inculcates. The positive institutions and external ceremonies appointed by Jesus Christ are few in number, simple in their nature, easy of observance, and moral in their tendency.

The ecclesiastical polity established by our divine Lord is fully adapted to the purpose of his reign. Christ declares that his kingdom is not of this world. His religion intermeddles not with the concerns of civil government any further than its influence extends to form men to purity of charac-

ter, and to induce them faithfully to execute their duty in the relations they sustain. It does not invade the province of the civil ruler ; nor does it permit human authority arbitrarily to define its doctrines, to propagate its truths by the sword, or to enforce its peculiar laws by human sanctions. Its privileges are granted to all, and each individual is accountable to God, and to God only, for their improvement. But my particular design, under this branch of our subject, is, to state the condition of the priesthood, and to describe the form of ecclesiastical government, as these existed in the days of the apostles. Two systems can scarce differ more from each other, in these respects, than the Christian Church, in the times of the apostles, differs from the Church of Rome, at the commencement of the reformation.

The general method pursued by the apostles and evangelist, in the establishment of our religion, seems to have been this :—They first passed through Gentile countries, preaching the gospel, and performing miracles, in proof of their divine mission ; and all who were endued with spiritual gifts were employed in propagating the Christian faith, and instructing those who were disposed to receive the word of life. On a second journey, as many of the proselytes to Christianity as could conveniently attend on the publick institutions of the gospel, in one place, were formed into distinct congregations or Churches. Church and congregation in primitive times, meant the same society ; and particular pastors were ordained to officiate in the worship and instruction of the Lord's day.—

New converts needed much instruction; and ministers were often interrupted in their official labours, by persecution, and other causes peculiar to that period: more than one pastor, therefore, was frequently appointed in the same Church. But there is, I believe, no proof from the New Testament, that the apostles instituted more than one order of ministers, or that one minister was invested with more power than another. The Greek terms generally used by the sacred writers, to designate the official character of a minister, are, *Επισκοπος* and *Πρεσβύτερος*. In English, Bishop and Elder. One of these titles, we are told, was taken from the nature and duties of the ministerial office, and the other, from respect to the profession; both are descriptive of the same officer, and are indiscriminately used when his office and duties are defined. Two or three passages from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter, will be sufficient to support this remark. In Acts (xx. 17) we read that Paul from Miletus sent to Ephesus, and called the Elders of the Church. In this place, the Greek word is *πρεσβύτερος*. In his address to these Church officers, when convened, Paul exhorts them, (verse 28)—“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers.” Here the Greek is *ἐπισκόπους*, bishops. No one can possibly doubt that these terms here refer to the same men, and that in the same communication they are denominated Elders and Bishops. In our text we are informed, that Titus was left at Crete, to set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain

Elders in every city. In the subsequent verses, we have a description of the qualifications of the Christian minister. "A Bishop must be blameless," &c. The usual Greek words are used in these passages—Πρεσβύτερος and Επισκοπος, Elder and Bishop. Elder and Bishop, therefore, in the language of St. Paul, mean the same Church officer. To our present purpose I will cite one passage from the first epistle of Peter, (v. 1.)—"The Elders, (Πρεσβύτερος) among you, I exhort." And the exhortation immediately follows, (verse 2)—"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof." In Greek, ἐπισκοπῶντες, that is, performing the duties of Bishops. This passage proves that Peter, as well as Paul, considered an Elder and a Bishop to be the same officer, and their duties to be one and the same.

Where is the authority found in the New Testament for the different orders of Christian ministers which are now constituent parts of many ecclesiastical establishments in Christendom? More especially, what authority can be derived from the directions of the apostles, or from the examples of the primitive age of our religion for the high dignity and the extensive powers with which Bishops in these establishments are now clothed? In the epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul thus addresses the united Christian community—"To all the saints at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons." Similar modes of address may be noted in other epistles. The distinction between the three classes here mentioned, we well know; their several characters are in the New Testament clearly described,

and their respective duties are fully explained. No Church was left destitute of a Bishop ; and in some, several were appointed. The assembly of Christians, the apostle addressed in the following manner—" We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

Deacons, in the primitive age, were not considered as an order of the priesthood. They aided the pastor in some of his official services : in the exercises of publick worship, they distributed the elements to communicants, and provided the materials for baptism ; but their general business was secular, and to them was committed the management of the prudential concerns of the Church.

The apostles fully explain the office of the minister of a particular Church : they clearly define his duty, and solemnly admonish him to its faithful execution. In the sacred writings, the distinct offices of Elders and Bishops are not described ; nor do we find directions which apply exclusively to an higher order of priests. If an higher order was appointed by the apostles, how shall we account for this neglect ? Take, for example, a Bishop, as this ecclesiastical officer is acknowledged in the Church of England. In him the right of ordination is exclusively vested : he has the oversight of all the clergy of his diocese ; and his jurisdiction is exercised over the whole number of Churches which compose it. There is not, I am satisfied, a passage in the New Testament which describes this office, nor one direction respecting the execution of its

duties. To the propriety of this remark, you, my Christian brethren, I believe, will assent, when you attend to the primitive government of the Christian Church.

It is unnecessary to bring into view the distinction between apostles who were supernaturally endowed to execute their high commission, and the ordinary ministers of the gospel. Apostles and evangelists acted by divine authority; and our present inquiry is, What is the constitution of the Christian Church as they established it? Where does the right of election to office, the authority to ordain the pastor elect, and the power to discipline the members of the Christian society ordinarily rest?

In respect to discipline, it is apparent that neither Christ nor his apostles empowered either a single Bishop, or the presbytery to try members on a charge of conduct unworthy the Christian name, or to inflict censures on those convicted of offence. On the contrary, this power was certainly lodged with the assembly of Christians. Examine the directions of our Saviour respecting measures to be adopted with an offending brother, contained in the 18th chapter of Matthew, and you will find that the authority to discipline is not committed to the pastor or to the presbytery, but to the brethren.—“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall

neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church ; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Look into the directions of St. Paul concerning the member guilty of a publick and most scandalous offence in the Corinthian Church. The apostle does not give his orders for discipline to the particular pastor of his Church, nor to an individual Bishop, nor to the convocation of the presbytery, but to the Christian body. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus."—(1 Cor. v. 4, 5) Deprive him of his Christian privileges, that he may be brought to repentance, and thereby save his soul. When our religion was taken under the auspices of the civil government, the clergy took on themselves the title of ecclesiasticks, denominated themselves the Church, and assumed power to lord it over the heritage of God. But no authority is found in the bible to denominate the clergy the Church. Nor, in primitive times, was the distinction between congregation and Church known. For three hundred years at least, after the death of our Saviour, the Christian society existed in one body ; and in one united society Christian disciples attended publick worship, and joined in all the ordinances of the gospel ; and in one assembly, all concerns of general interest were transacted. To this assembly, and not to the clergy, the right of electing to office, and the power of government, were committed.

That the election of Deacons, in the age of the apostles, was by the assembled brethren, cannot be doubted. When complaint was made of the unequal distribution of publick charity, “the twelve apostles called the multitude unto them and said, (Acts vi. 2—5) It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost,” &c.

The apostles, during their lives, unquestionably selected and ordained ministers. As inspired men, they exercised more power in the Church, than they permitted ordinary ministers, their successors, to exercise. But even in the high concern of appointing an apostle to take the place of the fallen Judas, regard was had by divine direction, to the right of the brethren in electing their ministers. Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and directed them to choose two candidates for the office of the apostate; and he selected one of these by lot, to take a part in the apostleship from which Judas, by transgression, fell.

From scriptural history it is evident, that pastors of particular Churches were not uniformly ordained by the apostles or by evangelists during their lives. Nay, it is apparent, evangelists themselves did not always receive ordination from the apostles. St. Paul thus exhorts his son Timothy—“Neglect not

the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, and the laying on the hands of the presbytery." Paul and Barnabas, as well as Timothy, were separated to their work, by the imposition of the hands of the presbytery.

The sacred history of the Christian Church is not continued beyond the lives of the apostles. We must depend on the authority of ecclesiastical historians for the usages and practices of the next age. Respecting the choice of ministers, there is not complete harmony among them. Some affirm that the election was solely with the brethren; others favour the supposition, that ordained ministers nominated candidates to vacant churches; but they concede that the brethren had a right to reject the candidate nominated, without assigning a reason for rejecting him. The fact probably was, that ministers then, as they frequently do now, recommended candidates; and perhaps in some instances, the recommendation, which societies at first solicited as a favour, ministers eventually claimed as their right of nomination. In the western Church, pastors of particular Churches, and even Bishops, were chosen by the brethren till 1050, when the council of Avignon deprived them of this privilege.

The ordination of candidates was in usual cases considered as the appropriate office of ordained pastors; but when peculiar circumstances rendered it expedient, lay ordination was acknowledged to be valid.

Churches in primitive times were independent. They possessed equal rights, and each had the ex-

clusive management of its own concerns. But to a certain extent a community of interests has ever existed among neighbouring Churches ; and ecclesiastical councils have been common in every age. But general councils, on scriptural grounds, I conceive, have authority only to give advice. They do not possess power to coerce the adoption of measures recommended. Particular ecclesiastical councils, called mutually by the parties in controversy, are similar to references in civil affairs, and their results are binding on the parties only by their own agreement.

I have gone into this review for two purposes ; 1st—To make it manifest that we have a reason to give for the constitution and order of congregational Churches. And 2d—That a view of the primitive state of the Christian Church being fixed in your minds, you may be the better able to judge of the corruptions and abuses, which at a subsequent age were introduced.

SERMON VII.

ECCLESIASTICAL POWER AND DOMINION WERE GRADUALLY ASSUMED BY THE PRIESTHOOD.

1 PETER v. 3.

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

IN this chapter, the apostle gives particular directions to the ordinary ministers of the gospel.—“The elders who are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

These directions are plain, important, and solemn. Christian disciples are here represented under the allusion to a flock, which has ever been considered as an emblem of innocence. Of this flock the pastor has the oversight in the Lord; and

to him the care, the tenderness and the vigilance of the good shepherd are recommended. This duty is to be performed, not under the impulse of worldly circumstances, but from inclination ; not from a primary view to the emoluments of offices, but from the dictates of a mind devoted to the moral purposes of the gospel. St. Peter exhorts ministers not to assume authority in the Church, as officers appointed to dictate and rule in the concerns of religion, and possessed of a divine right to control the consciences of men, and govern religious opinions ; but he directs them to preach the word of life, and to enforce their wholesome counsel by an exemplification of the virtues they inculcate, that the people of their charge may take them as their examplers as well as teachers. To inspire the ministers of the altar with the most animating motives to faithfulness and perseverance, the apostle carries their minds forward to the consummation of the present system of things, when Christ shall appear for judgment ; and he assures them they will then receive their reward, even the crown of glory, honour, and immortality.

Happy would it have been for the Christian world, had the successors of St. Peter regarded his sacred directions, imbibed the spirit of their Master and of his apostles, and supported the ministerial relation in conformity to the rules enjoined them. But in subsequent periods, how many who bore the name of Christian ministers, inattentive to apostolick precept and example, manifested the spirit of the world, assumed dominion over conscience, and ruled as lords of God's heritage.

The audience will recollect, that on a former occasion, I proposed to review the primitive state of the Christian Church, consider the causes which led to the superstitions and abuses of the Roman Hierarchy, examine the nature and extent of the reformation, and state our duty as protestants.

The second branch of this general subject is the object of our present attention, viz.

2. The manner in which ecclesiastical power and dominion were gradually assumed by the Christian priesthood.

Under this proposition, I shall review the general state of the Christian community in ages immediately succeeding that of the apostles. The usurpation of the Bishop of Rome, and the corruptions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy, will be particularly discussed at a future time.

That your view of the subject may be distinct and clear, I will divide the proposition into two branches :—First, briefly state the circumstances that introduced different orders of priests into the Church, and led to the establishment of the offices of Bishops and Archbishops ; and then describe the manner in which ecclesiasticks gradually assumed power and dominion over the community of Christians.

Let us, my Christian hearers, carry our reflection back to primitive times, and consider the condition of the professors of our religion in the age immediately following that of the apostles. At that time, the number of Christian disciples composed a minor portion of the population of any city

or village. Then a single Church embraced a large city, and perhaps a considerable extent of country.

The body of professors generally were noviciates in our religion, and required extraordinary attention from their spiritual instructors. Many of them, on account of their local situation, could but occasionally attend the stated place of the publick ministrations of the word and ordinances of the gospel, even in the most peaceable and quiet times of the Church.

The members of the Christian community being thus situated, a custom early prevailed of ordaining two or more ministers of the same Church. These were co-equal in office, and mutually aided in the performance of all the duties of the pastoral relation among a community whose members were widely separated from each other. As converts to the Christian faith were multiplied, professors within the limits originally embraced by a single Church become too numerous ever to meet in one place for the purpose of publick worship, or a participation in the ordinances of the gospel. New Churches were therefore gathered in the same city; or the distant members formed into distinct Churches in their own towns and villages; and it more frequently happened, that some of the ministers, who had been ordained pastors of the parent Church, were located as parish priests in the newly formed societies. But this separation of those who had once been members of the same Church was not complete. These were holden to be associated Churches; and they were considered as having in a peculiar sense, a community of interest. The

ministers of these respective societies often had their meetings, to consult and advise with each other respecting measures designed to promote the cause of Christian truth and virtue. From respect to the parent Church, its minister, who having been selected for this office on account of distinguished talents, gravity, &c. was acknowledged as the moderator of these assemblies of the clergy. And in consequence of this office, a distinction was made between the terms Bishop and Elder. In the New Testament, and during the apostolick age, these were used synonymously, and neither meant any thing more than the minister of a particular Church ; but now the minister of the parent Church was, by way of distinction, denominated Bishop, and the pastors of the newly formed societies were called Elders, and the united societies were called a Diocese. In this way two orders of ministers were established. Deacons originally were considered as the almoners of the Church ; and no service was performed by them, in the offices of publick worship, but serving the bread and wine to communicants, and providing materials for baptism : but when Churches were multiplied, and ministerial labours were increased, the Deacons were often requested to give their aid in offices of worship ; and in process of time candidates for the ministry were appointed Deacons, as a station in which they might, with the more facility, prepare themselves for the higher duties of the priesthood ; or, to adopt the language of an ecclesiastical historian—"The Deacons, who seem at first to have been chosen merely in consequence of a particular

exigence, as we learn from Acts vi. 1, to wit :—For the inspection of the poor, and the distribution of the charitable collections, were admitted very early to an inferiour part in the sacred ministry, such as attending the pastors in the discharge of religious offices, and acting under their direction. The deaconship served in fact as a noviciate to the ministry.” Finally, deacons were admitted as a distinct, though inferiour, class of the priesthood. In this way three orders of the ministry were established, bishops, elders or presbyters, and deacons.

But the bishop of that age bore scarce any resemblance to the bishop of a later period. There was no revenue appropriated for the support of the bishoprick : he claimed no authority over the presbyters, he exercised no spiritual jurisdiction over the associated Churches. Nor did the several orders of priests, as a body of ecclesiasticks, pretend to power and dominion in the Church, in right of their clerical office. The bishop was merely the first among his brethren of the ministry. In his name, invitation was given to the elders or presbyters of the diocese to meet, when their assembling was thought expedient ; and he acted as president in their meetings. But the rights of the brethren were not yet invaded. Bishops and elders were elected to office by common suffrage ; and all transactions of the Church in which there was a common interest, were managed in meetings of clergy and laity, as one united body.

As the darkness of Paganism vanished before the light of the gospel, Christian Churches were

multiplied; and, in consequence of it, a kingdom or province was sometimes divided into several distinct dioceses. Circumstances frequently rendered it expedient that the whole number of the clergy of a province or kingdom should be assembled in convocation. For a time, the individual to preside in this convocation was elected from the body assembled, and his commission expired with the business of the meeting; but it became a custom that the bishop of the capital city, where the assembly was holden, should preside in these assemblies; and in this instance, as in many others, custom in time became law; and the bishop of the capital was acknowledged as the head of the clergy of his province or kingdom, and took the title of Primate, Metropolitan, or Archbishop. But this system was not fully ripened till the Roman government became Christian.

Let us now attend to the manner in which ecclesiasticks gradually assumed power and dominion over the Christian community.

The disposition to assume power, and to abuse it, has been too common to men of every description. History proves that ecclesiasticks have manifested this disposition in as high a degree as men in any other department of publick agency. We shall be surprised to remark what trivial circumstances are made the means of aggrandizing a body of publick men, when they, by their stations, are rendered ambitious and act in concert; and when the people, whose ministers they are, possess an unsuspecting temper and an yielding spirit. Many cases might be adduced to our present purpose; but I

have time to present to your view only a single example of the manner in which the clergy of the Christian Church commenced their career of ecclesiastical ambition and tyranny.

When in the apostolick age, the number of Christian disciples became so numerous, in the populous cities of the Roman empire, as to form themselves into societies, wholly separate in all religious concerns, from the Pagan world, disputes arose, as they ever will, among imperfect beings, "respecting personal property and civil rights." These disputes were carried before the Pagan tribunals, and were settled according to the principles of the Roman law. These quarrels and law-suits occasioned ill-will, animosity, and uncharitableness, among the brethren themselves; and were thought to reflect scandal on their profession as Christians. In view of these evils, which particularly abounded in the Church of Corinth, St. Paul condemned their litigious spirit, and exhorted them rather to bear injury with patience, than to have recourse to measures of redress, which must put the peace of the Church and the character of their religion at hazard. "Why do ye not rather," says the apostle, "take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" As the most effectual measure to prevent publick scandal, he advises them to submit their controversies to the decision of arbitrators chosen from among themselves. This apostolick advice was generally adopted among Christian converts, and the practice was continued as long as the Roman government remained Pagan.

The business of arbitration did not pertain to the pastoral office ; and in the commencement of this method of settling disputes there was nothing on which an unworthy motive could operate in the management of it. When executed by the pastor, it increased his labours, held him up more conspicuously to the ruling power, and thereby increased, in respect to him, the danger of persecution. His judgment had not the authority of law, and it could be executed only by the consent of the parties at issue. No pecuniary rewards were connected with this transaction ; it was considered as the work of charity. In selecting arbitrators, questions of this nature naturally arose :—Who so likely to feel a tender regard to the rights of every brother as the minister, the spiritual father of the Christian family ? Who will so impartially consult the safety and welfare of each individual member, as the common shepherd of the flock ? From these or other considerations, the clergy in fact, were in all places appointed the arbitrators in civil controversies ; and the practice was continued to the period of the conversion of the Roman empire. What at first was custom, was, in time, claimed as a right. The service at first performed from charity, was continued from ambition. By experiment, the clergy found that from their station, as an umpire in civil affairs, they derived power, ascendancy, and influence, and these they were not disposed to relinquish.

Individual authority being granted them in respect to personal property and civil rights, the clergy, with greater plausibility, claimed exclusive

authority in all the concerns of religion. These lay within their own province, and the regulation of them was their own appropriate duty. Step by step they proceeded to divest the people of every privilege. They deprived the laity of the liberty of electing their minister, and of every other officer of the Church; and denied them any publick agency in the management of the common interests of the society which they composed. When Constantine was converted to the Christian faith, and the civil government became Christian, he, with the zeal of a convert, and in devotion to the priests of his new religion, confirmed the clergy in all the prerogatives they had before exercised; and ecclesiastical decisions were enforced by civil authority. Then the clergy denominated themselves ecclesiastics, and declared that they, as a body, composed the Church, and of course assumed the whole administration of its polity. The right then left to the laymen was simply the right of submission and obedience. The people were to commit their understandings and their consciences to the guidance of their spiritual rulers, and to resign their souls to the safe keeping of the ghostly fathers.

Becoming lords of God's heritage, the clergy apportioned the emoluments of the Church among themselves. Bishops then claimed dignity, authority, and wealth, corresponding with the proud titles they assumed, and the lofty stations which they professed to fill. They usurped the exclusive power of ordination, jurisdiction over the inferior orders of the clergy, and the absolute direction of all the affairs of their diocese. Large reve-

nues were appropriated for their support ; their places of residence became palaces, and they were encircled with all the appendages and pomp of royalty. Ecclesiasticks then generally gave almost unbounded indulgence to the spirit of pride and ambition, against which their Divine Master pointedly and solemnly cautioned the ministers of his gospel. Before the close of the fourth century of the Christian era, the constitution, the forms, and the character of the Church of the apostolick age disappeared, and a system of domination and tyranny, of blindness and superstition was introduced.

Thankful to God for the religious freedom and light with which we are blessed, let us, my Christian brethren, stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free ; and may we walk as children of the light.

SERMON VIII.

THE USURPATION OF THE BISHOP OF ROME.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 4.

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

WITHOUT comment, I shall make this text the theme of one branch of the general subject proposed for discussion, viz.

1. The primitive state of the Christian Church.
2. The manner in which ecclesiastical power and dominion were gradually assumed by the Christian priesthood.
3. The rise and extent of the usurpation of the Bishop of Rome.
4. The causes which produced the separation of protestants from the Romish Church ; and the nature and extent of the Reformation.
5. The duty of protestants to act in consistency with their avowed principles, and to make progressive improvements in religious knowledge and attainments in Christian virtue, corresponding with the means of the age in which they live.

To the third proposition, our attention will at this time be directed, viz.

3. The rise and extent of the usurpation of the Bishop of Rome; and the corruptions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy.

The supremacy, which the Bishop of Rome acquired, has not a parallel in the history of the world. Jesus Christ, the common Lord and Master of Christians, declared that his kingdom is not of this world; and he in the most express terms forbid his disciples to cherish the spirit of domination, or to exercise authority over the consciences of men in the concerns of religion. When James and John ambitiously requested the honour of sitting, one at the right hand, and the other at the left, of their Master, in his kingdom of glory, he called the twelve disciples before him, and said unto them—"Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Yet the ministers of the meek and humble Jesus, in violation of the command of their Lord, did aspire to supreme dominion, as well in civil as ecclesiastical concerns.—The Bishop of Rome, claiming to be the successor of St. Peter, and the vicegerent of Christ, succeeded in the attempt to subjugate the understandings and the consciences of men to his authority, and to

place their property and their lives at his disposal. The proudest king was made to bow with servile submission to his rule, and the most powerful emperor to tremble at his mandate.

Every reflecting mind must be disposed to review measures which occasioned such perversion of the principles of the gospel, and to trace the steps that led the Christian bishop to this spiritual dominion.

It is well known, that the Pope of Rome, for ages, has founded his claim of supremacy on the plea that this dominion in the Church was given to the apostle Peter, who was, as they affirm, the first bishop of Rome; and that the Pope, as his successor, inherits all the prerogatives which St. Peter possessed. It may, not therefore, be amiss in the introduction, to examine this plea. The pretence that Peter was constituted head of the Christian Church, is founded on the declaration of our Saviour to him.—“Thou art Peter; and on this rock (the meaning of the Greek word Πέτρος) I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.” This declaration was made in consequence of Peter’s profession of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Our Saviour then changed his name from Simon to Peter, and pronounced the above-mentioned benediction. But the only distinction which this gave Peter above his fellow apostles, was the honour of be-

ing the first to publish the Christian religion to the Gentile world—opening the door of faith to the Gentiles, as Paul expresses it. Peter's address to his countrymen, is the best comment of the promise of our Saviour to him.—“Brethren, ye know that God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel.” That is, first hear it : but in the propagation of the Christian faith, his fellow apostles were his coadjutors. In this cause, St. Paul laboured more abundantly, and declared that he was not a whit behind the chiefest of the apostles. This is the amount of giving the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter. It gave him no other privilege than that of first preaching the gospel to Gentiles : it invested him with no exclusive prerogative. “On this rock I will build my Church !” You shall have the honour to build up the Christian kingdom : but the other apostles were fellow labourers with him,—Christian societies, says St. Paul, “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.”—“Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.” This is figurative language, borrowed from Jewish phraseology. The meaning is, that Peter was commissioned to publish the conditions of pardon and salvation to sinners ; and that whatsoever he, under divine inspiration, should publish on earth, as bound or forbidden men, as a disqualification for the happiness of immortality ; and whatsoever he on earth should publish, as loosened, or permitted, or enjoined men,

pertaining to life eternal, should be ratified and confirmed by the authority of God in heaven. But this was not the prerogative of Peter alone: the commission for this high purpose was given to all the apostles.

There is not the shadow of evidence that Peter was constituted the bishop of Rome: that he was ever in the city of Rome, rests wholly on traditionary evidence; there is no passage in the New Testament that favours such a supposition. The earliest ecclesiastical historians mention Linus, whose name occurs in the salutation of Paul to Timothy, as the first bishop of Rome. The commission of an apostle extended to the whole Christian community. To station him as a parish minister, or place him at the head of the clergy of a province, or even kingdom, would be to degrade him from his apostolick office.

Peter was the oldest man among the twelve disciples of our Lord; and from several passages of the New Testament, it appears that he acted as the president of the standing council of Christians at Jerusalem. In the Gospels, and in the Acts, his name generally stands first, when an enumeration of individuals is made. Matthew, himself an apostle, stiles Peter the first: that is, first among equals. He acted as the presiding officer: as such he delivered their decisions, and to him in this capacity probably letters to the council were addressed; but it is evident that he possessed no exclusive authority; for this very council sent Peter and John into Samaria, as their missionaries to the new converts of that province. This appears more like

obeying the commands of the council, than claiming a controlling superiority over them. With modern notions of the supremacy of the Pope, what would a Roman Catholick think, if he should be told that the college of cardinals had sent his holiness, as their legate, into a distant country? That Peter claimed not authority over Paul, we know, for Paul withstood him to his face, and carried the point against him. On the whole, the pretence that Peter was invested by his Master with supreme power in the Church, that he was constituted the first bishop of Rome, and that his successors in office inherit all his power, is without any solid support.

Let us then inquire for the means by which the Pope acquired dominion.

In the age that may be called apostolick, the elder or bishop of Rome was the pastor of a single Church, and was elected to his office by the suffrages of the Christian society. As Christian converts were multiplied in Italy, new Churches were formed, but were considered as branches of the parent Church; and Rome, as the capital city of the empire, and the original seat of the parent Church, gave dignity and rank to its bishop.—Rome was acknowledged as the great centre of the Christian community, till Constantine removed his court to the city that bore his name. At Rome, all general councils were convened, and here all great questions respecting the polity, the doctrines, and the discipline of the Church were decided. These considerations all tended to encrease the importance of this bishoprick. When the civil empire was estab-

lished at Constantinople, a violent contention arose between the pontiff of ancient Rome and the bishop of the newly honoured Constantinople, for superiority. But when the Turks conquered the greater portion of Asia, Constantinople dwindled into comparative insignificance, and Rome maintained without a rival its superiority. But that the bishop derived his relative importance from the place of his residence, and not from any authority transmitted through Peter, is most evident ; for whenever a province of the western empire was divided, in respect to its civil government, which was sometimes done, a corresponding division was made by the ecclesiastical diocese ; and the capital city of the newly established province was made the seat of a new bishoprick, the minister of which was constituted the Metropolitan of this newly formed diocese.

The favourable circumstances respecting the local situation of Rome inspired its bishop with the spirit of ambition, and a plan of aggrandizement was early formed, which, through succeeding ages, was systematically prosecuted. Science and literature were buried in the ruins of the Roman empire at its conquest, by the barbarians of northern Europe. An age of ignorance and darkness ensued, favourable to the aspiring views of the ecclesiastical court of Christian Rome. Its bishop no longer deigned to depend for his titles and honours, on the election of the Christian society. He claimed a divine right to his office, and professed to rule in the Church by power derived from Christ. The power assumed by one aspiring bishop was never relinquished by his successor, though his natural

disposition might be more mild, and his general character approach nearer to the standard of Christian simplicity and godly sincerity. Advantage was taken of the contention of civil princes, and every concession made by emperor or king in the day of depression, or to answer a present purpose, was holden as an established prerogative of the Pope, and was made the means of still higher acquisitions of power ; and in process of time, the head of the Church became a sovereign prince, usurped the most important attributes of civil government, claimed a superiority over all civil rulers, and by precepts issued from his conclave, disposed of kingdoms and empires. The deepest policy was adopted to promote the purposes of this spiritual tyranny, and efficient measures used apparently not to enlighten the minds of men in the knowledge of religious truth, and to form their dispositions to the spirit of the gospel, but to make them the submissive children of the Church which assumed dominion over their faith. These political measures were various, but all directed to the same object.

On a former occasion, we took a cursory notice of the exemptions plead for ecclesiasticks, from trials in ordinary judicial courts. The Church of Rome successfully prosecuted these claims to a most extravagant and pernicious length. "The clergy, the more effectually to exercise power over the laity, exempted themselves from all civil jurisdiction." "By degrees," says an ecclesiastical historian, "the dignity of the priests rose so much higher than that of the temporal powers, that it was deemed a thing absolutely intolerable that a clergy-

man should be subject to any temporal tribunal ; and as the common law did not punish with death, the clergy enjoyed almost an absolute impunity from the commission of any crime whatever.— And in those dark and ignorant ages, the disposition of the clergy to violence, and crimes of every nature, was little, if at all, less than that of the laity. It appears, in the reign of Henry III. of England, that more than a hundred murders had been committed by clergymen, whom the civil powers could not bring to justice. As to the higher ranks of the clergy, it was hardly possible that they should be punished for any crime, on account of their right of appeal to Rome, and the certainty of their finding protection there, especially if they had any difference with their sovereign. Besides, in these times, no clergyman could be punished capitally without previous degradation ; and a priest could not be degraded but by eight bishops, to assemble whom was a great expense.”

The Roman clergy, not satisfied with exempting themselves from trial before tribunals appointed by the civil government, brought within the ecclesiastical courts exclusively all causes relating to marriages, alimony, and wills ; and in many instances encroached on the more common administration of justice.

Not merely in the administration of justice did the Roman pontiff invade the rights of civil government. In the year 606, the emperor Phocas, by a publick decree, invested the Pope with the title of Universal Bishop, and clothed him with superior authority in all ecclesiastical concerns. Thus em-

powered, the servant became too mighty for the master. From this time the Pope claimed the right of nominating and investing bishops in all the Churches in Europe, though the claim was not immediately allowed in every kingdom. He not only assumed a full domination in ecclesiastical affairs, but usurped the civil power, and often, by his mandate, established and removed kings. A Pope arrogantly declared to a sovereign potentate, "that the dignity of the Pope was as much superior to that of the Emperor, as the administration of the things of heaven is above that of the things of earth."

Another measure adopted to promote the scheme of Papal power and aggrandizement, was the prohibition of the marriage of priests. By this means, the ties of country were loosened, and the tender bonds of domestick life were broken asunder through all orders of the priesthood. The clergy were considered as married to the Church: with the Church their interests were identified; and as a body, they were devoted to its purposes. Several orders of monks were established as distinct corps in this service. They depended on the Pope for their existence, derived their support from the revenues of the Church, and always were ready to obey, without hesitation, the commands of the pontiff. For centuries, what of literature there was in Europe, was confined to the above classes of priests; and the superstition, as well as ignorance, of the people, rendered them the easy dupes of their spiritual guides. Large revenues in money were raised under various pretences; a great portion of

the lands in Europe, become the property of the Church and the estates of the Church were considered sacred; and to withdraw any part of it from the object of its appropriation, was deemed to be the height of impiety. On the pretext that their prayers would avail to redeem a soul from purgatory, the clergy made bargains with the deluded people for the benefit of deceased friends. A given amount of money was paid for the redemption of the soul of a departed relative from punishment; and the sum was always proportioned to the wealth of the family which was a party to the contract. The sale of indulgencies was another productive branch of revenue to the Church; but we shall have occasion to mention this in another place. By these means the Papal Church amassed immense wealth.

One efficient measure to accomplish the ambitious designs of the Roman pontiff, was the claim of infallibility. As the vicegerent of Christ on earth, the Pope claimed the possession not only of power to rule the Church universal, but also the authority to determine the true meaning of scripture, to decide all controversies, to judge on every doctrinal publication, and to settle all questions of conscience. The people were never to use their own judgment on religion, but implicitly to bow their understandings to the wiser decisions of their spiritual fathers; and though the truth of a position should appear to their minds as clear as the light of the meridian sun, yet if it was pronounced by the infallible judge untrue, they must with heart and

soul acquiesce, and sincerely believe as the Church decreed. Having an infallible teacher, the bible was not thought necessary for the laity ; and on the plea that they had not judgment to understand its communications, it was withholden from their perusal.

As though all this was not enough for the purposes of delusion, the Papal Church held the doctrine of tradition : that is, they maintained that the apostles of our Lord, from prudential considerations, did not commit to writing, the whole system of divine revelation, but transmitted, by oral tradition, certain principles and rules, which are of equal authority with the written will of God. These traditions were committed, from generation to generation to the safe keeping of ecclesiasticks, who in reality composed the Christian Church ; and the laity are solemnly bound to receive these from their priest, on the authority of God. From this secret treasury the Papal clergy could draw any order, precept, or rule, calculated to subserve the designs of their ambition, avarice, or sensuality ; and no one, on the penalty of his salvation, must question its validity.

Excommunication was used as a powerful instrument to subserve the designs of Papal usurpation. The Pope fulminated the sentence of excommunication against all who manifested a spirit of opposition to the requisitions of the Church, or made the slightest resistance to the execution of her decrees. This sentence deprived the excommunicated of every religious privilege, excluded them from a participation in the rights of humanity, and made them forlorn outcasts in society. Their

bodies were denied Christian burial ; and the ignorant and superstitious wretches died in the full expectation that the Papal sentence would be ratified at the tribunal of heaven, and would prove the seal of their eternal perdition. Sometimes a whole kingdom was excommunicated for an act of insubordination in its sovereign. This sentence closed every Church in the realm, and suspended the exercise of every Christian office through the whole community. It was received by the mass of the people with astonishment and terrou, like that which would be experienced, should the sun cease to shine, and the elements of heaven be made the ministers of divine vengeance on a guilty nation.

To complete this system of spiritual imposition and tyranny, the Papal Church established the court of inquisition, to guard against the very semblance of opposition to its authority. On mere suspicion of the want of allegiance to their sovereignty, the officers of this court, in the midnight hour, and with the silence of the thief, invaded the mansion of the citizen, and dragged the master of the household from the bosom of his family to a dungeon, where he was not confronted with his accuser, where no charge was laid against him, nor measures of defence allowed ; but where he was tortured and forced to a confession against himself ; and where, when policy dictated, he expired on the wheel. Still his dearest relative dared not inquire for the cause of his arrest ; nor his best friend lisp the story of his sufferings and destruction. Is it then possible that the liberal institutions of the gospel should be thus perverted to

purposes of domination and cruelty ? Is it possible that the religion of love and benevolence should be made the instrument to accomplish the designs of human pride and ambition ? While we review the terrific features of Papal tyranny, our blood becomes cold, and our minds, in detestation, recoil from the contemplation of the hateful picture.

But this complicated apparatus of means, this immense engine of power, fully answered the intended design of aggrandizement. The minister of the lowly Jesus assumed the loftiest titles, and decorated himself with a triple crown. He appeared in all the magnificence, and was surrounded with all the splendour and pomp of royalty. Encircled by his cardinals, the Pope issued decrees which not only regulated the religious affairs of every Church, but also effected the most important interests of the civil governments of Europe, and not unfrequently disposed of the thrones of kings and emperors. Here he arrogated the attributes of Divinity, and presumed to exercise the prerogative of God. He exalted himself above all that is called God : he as God, sat in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

This must suffice to show the rise and extent of the usurpation of the Bishop of Rome. The corruptions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy will be more fully considered on a future occasion.

SERMON IX.

THE CORRUPTIONS AND ABUSES OF THE PAPAL
HIERARCHY.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 9.

Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.

IN the last discourse, we reviewed the manner in which the Bishop of Rome usurped power and dominion. From the passage of scripture before us, I shall direct your attention to

The corruptions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy.

It has already been mentioned that the Bishop of Rome was originally a parish minister, elected to office by the members of his society. As Christian converts were multiplied, new Churches were formed in Rome and its vicinity, and pastors were established to administer the ordinances of the gospel among them; but the minister of the parent Church was considered as the first among equals: he summoned the meetings of the clergy, and presided in them. When the Roman government be-

came Christian, the ecclesiastical divisions of the empire were made to correspond with its civil divisions ; and Rome, being the capital city, its bishop took precedence of all others. After Constantinople became the seat of civil government, the Bishop of Rome and of Constantinople often disputed the question of rank. Early in the sixth century the Emperor Phocas gave the Pope of Rome the title of Universal Bishop. He and subsequent emperors and kings granted extensive territories to the Papal Church, which since has been denominated the Patrimony of St. Peter. From the above-mentioned period, the Pope was, at least through Europe, acknowledged as the head of the Christian community ; and all the Archbishops with their suffragan Bishops submitted to him as possessing the legislative, the judicial, and the executive power of the Church.

The first change made in the election of the Pope was the admission of the clergy belonging to the diocese of Rome to vote with the people of the city. The next gave the clergy the right of nomination, and the people expressed their assent. The approbation of the emperor, in process of time, became necessary ; and without it, investiture in office was not permitted. But at length the pontiff gave essential assistance to a particular German emperor, in his contention with a rival power ; and, as a reward, received from him the relinquishment of the imperial right of approving the election of the Pope. That the right might never be resumed, the pontiff finally asserted that he held his honours, not by human, but by Divine authority. As the suc-

cessor of St. Peter, the prince of the apostles, he claimed the keys of the Christian kingdom; and declared that he was invested with all power, in things temporal as well as spiritual. The mitre was pronounced to be above the crown, and it was solemnly averred that kings, as well as bishops, derived their power to rule from the Pope, the vicerent of Christ. The Pope published as a law of the gospel, "that the Bishop of Rome is the supreme lord of the universe, and that neither princes nor bishops, civil governors nor ecclesiastical rulers, have any lawful power in Church or state, but what they derive from him." To support this assumed character, the pontiff now set up the claim of infallibility.

Severe altercations and great disorders often occurring in the election of the Pope, at the close of the eleventh century, the Roman pontiff, by decree, formed a college of cardinals, and invested them with the exclusive right of election. All vacancies in the college are filled by the Pope himself. Seventy, I believe, has been, for a long time past, the stated number of cardinals composing this college.

Arrogating to himself power in heaven and on earth, the proud head of the Church maintained by subtle policy his spiritual empire, and drew immense revenues from the nations of Europe. Immersed in luxury, and surrounded with the minions of his greatness, his elevated station attracted the attention of the voluptuous, and became the object of envy to the ambitious and aspiring. A mitred minister of the Church, endeavouring to convert a distinguished heathen philosopher to his faith, re-

ceived the following reply :—" Make me Bishop of Rome, and I will be a Christian."

Corruption and abuse were the natural consequences of unbounded power and wealth. To secure prerogatives already obtained, and to extend them as circumstances permitted, became the ruling principle of the Papal throne ; Christian doctrines and Christian morals were of subordinate consideration. In the primitive age, personal qualifications alone gave influence to individuals. Then the minister of the gospel rose to eminence and distinction, as he displayed a knowledge of the system he professed to teach, as he discovered vigilance and fidelity in the performance of ministerial duties, and as he gave an exemplification of the Christian virtues and graces ; but when our religion obtained the support of civil government, and Christian ministers became lords and princes, the power of office secured influence, and wealth furnished the means of homage and submission, though the minister were a novice in theology ; though he were totally destitute of the spirit of his Master ; and though in life and conversation he violated every precept of the gospel. The history of the Christian Church, through succeeding generations, fully verifies these remarks. For the sake of perspicuity, I will consider this branch of our subject under distinct heads.

1. The usurpation of the Roman pontiff was attended with the corruption of the great body of the clergy.

An age of ignorance and barbarism succeeded the fall of the Roman empire. The Papal Hie-

rarchy availed itself of this state of things, to erect a monarchy almost as extensive as had been the civil dominion of Rome, and to establish a despotism more oppressive than that which was supported by the Roman sword. But the measures by which this spiritual power governed, were widely different. Intrigue and sophistry, artifice and deception, the prostitution of every thing sacred in truth, and important in religion, were among the most efficacious means used to extend and maintain this spiritual dominion. The Papal court became corrupt and venal, from its head down to its menial attendants. Popes, who styled themselves the divine guardians of the sacred truths of revelation, and the infallible guides of the whole Christian family in the paths of salvation, disregarding the moral purpose of the clerical office, and falsifying all their lofty pretensions to spirituality and holiness, devoted themselves to schemes of ambition and aggrandizement, or sunk into the most luxurious and profligate course of life, according with the constitutional complexion of their minds. To show the extravagant lengths to which the dissipation of the Papal court was carried, sober history relates, that a particular Pope kept in his stables more than two thousand hunting horses, for the sportings of himself, his cardinals, bishops, and other ghostly functionaries of his establishment. The fountain being thus impure, the streams of course became foul. The Bishops, in their splendid palaces, found their employment in the expenditure of their immense income, to the neglect of

the ordinary duties of the ministerial profession. Bishops ceased to be constant preachers. They became haughty and imperious, demanding homage and deference from every class of men in society. Among canons particularly designed to regulate the conduct of the clergy, and which had the sanction of the council of Trent, we find the following, viz.—

“ Against those bishops, who in Church, or out of it, behave themselves meanly towards the ministers of kings, persons of quality, and barons, and with too much indignity, not only give place to them, but do them personal service ; the synod detesting this conduct, and renewing the canons concerning the decorum of episcopal dignity, commands bishops to beware of such practices, and every where to challenge due respect to their degree, remembering that they are pastors ; and also commands princes and all others to bear them the honour and reverences due to fathers.” Preaching, religious instruction, and all the offices of publick worship, were committed to inferiour priests ; many of whom were grossly ignorant, more were immoral, and in general, they did not feel the obligations or the responsibility of parish ministers ; but, like their superiours, they found the real duties of their stations a burden, and made the formal discharge of them as light and easy as possible. The publick exercises of the Sabbath, as we shall more fully perceive under a subsequent particular, as it respects their moral purpose and important design, were subverted.

2. Monkish institutions proved the source of great corruptions and abuse in the Christian Church.

The orders of monks had their origin in the times of persecution by the Roman emperors. At those periods, many professors of the gospel justly prizing their Christian hopes above worldly emoluments, or even life itself, fled from the prospects of a cruel death, to which constancy in their religion daily exposed them; and from the temptation to apostacy into which numbers of Christians were brought by the threatened evil, and sought their safety in solitude. Mountains and deserts, removed from the haunts of men, were the places of their retreat. Here men and women, and sometimes whole families, lived in the most simple manner; and they deemed security in religion to be happiness. But no idea of absolute seclusion from the business of the world, or from the intercourse of society, entered into their plan; nor were any of the number considered as taking on themselves a clerical, or, in a peculiar sense, a religious character. Avoidance of the evil of persecution, and safety and quietness in the enjoyment of the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, was the sole object of their retirement. In fact, when the terrors of persecution were removed, most of these returned to the common pursuits of civil life, in the cities and towns from which they had fled. But individuals, habituated to solitude, preferred a continuance of the life of quietness and serenity, to which they had long been accustomed.

The politick court of Rome saw the advantages which might accrue to the hierarchy from clothing

this class of men with a clerical garb, and consecrating them to the service of the Church. They were therefore, by a Papal decree, formed into an order of priests, by a distinct name; and canons were established, to regulate their discipline, and all the exercises of their devotions. When the monastick institution was first founded, it was poor, and the brethren appeared as men weaned from the world. They lived in a state of self-denial and bodily mortification: they were wholly separated from all the business and all the pleasures of society; and they made solemn vows of devoting themselves, mind and heart, to God and religion. This apparent sanctity and devotion made deep impressions on the imaginations of men of a dark age. The character of the monk was viewed as sacred, his round of ceremonial observances was deemed the height of piety, and his prayers were supposed ever to have efficacy at the throne of God.—Through several centuries, a spirit of infatuation prevailed on this subject. Men; it was universally thought, could not do greater service to God than to found these monastick institutions. These were multiplied in every kingdom of Europe. Parents often left their children without inheritance, that they might endow these establishments, and secure the prayers of the holy fraternity. Men, who through life had been habitually guilty of the grossest crimes, at the close of life took the vows, and were clad in the garment of the monk, in the expectation, as it seems, that the mere initiation into the order, would cancel their offences, and the garb be a passport to heaven. The consequence of

this infatuation was, that a great portion of the population were drawn from the important purposes of society, and devoted to an ascetick life ; and a large proportion of the property was taken from active business, and bestowed to enrich these useless institutions. On the devotees themselves, wealth produced its usual effects. Numbers, who wore the garments of abstinence and bodily mortification, lived within the walls of their monasteries in idle luxury ; some gave themselves up to unbounded licentiousness ; and the aspiring spirits among them opened a path to the world, found their way into the courts of kings, and there filled the highest places of government. But they all were devoted to their head, the Pope ; and a part of the wealth which circulated through their channels, was at last emptied into the coffers of the Papal treasury.

The general tendency of the monkish life was, to give people false views of the nature and design of religion, and to direct their religious services to an useless purpose. Men were not taught to live soberly, righteously, and piously, as a preparation for heaven ; but to leave the world, and devote themselves to ascetick observances ; or, if they could not make the required sacrifices, they might gain salvation through the mediation of these consecrated ministers of the altar. To show that this misapprehension was general, I need only mention the case of an individual monk, who saw the common delusion, and had the honesty and resolution to make an attempt to stem the torrent of this vile superstition. The doctrine he advanced was this—
“ That all those who kept the vows they made to

Christ at their baptism, and lived according to those rules of piety and virtue laid down in the gospel, had an equal title to the rewards of futurity ; and that consequently those, who passed their days in unsociable celibacy and severe mortifications and fastings, were in no respect more acceptable in the eye of God, than those who lived virtuously in the bands of marriage, and nourished their bodies with moderation and temperance." This rational doctrine was first condemned by the conclave at Rome, then by a numerous council assembled at Milan ; and the Christian emperor carried their result into execution, and banished this enlightened and honest monk to a desolate island.

It would be wrong not to mention that other examples of knowledge, right practice, and true charity, appeared among the monks ; that the little science and the useful literature which prevailed in the dark ages of Europe, were found in monasteries ; and that bright instances of benevolence were exhibited among them. But these were only exceptions to the corruptions and abuses which generally abounded among this order.

3. It was the policy of the Papal Church to keep the laity in gross ignorance, that they might the more easily hold them in thralldom ; and this systematick purpose must be marked among their gross corruptions and abuses.

Knowledge is the best guard against imposition—against religious imposition it is the most effectual. The Romanists adopted publick measures to prevent, among the people, improvements in knowledge. They assumed as a maxim,

that ignorance is the mother of devotion ; that faith rises in worth inversely with the evidence on which it is established ; and that faith which is founded in impossibility, is the most meritorious.—“ I believe, because it is impossible,” was the boast of a dignified member of this Church. In accordance with these maxims, all the forms of publick worship, and all the exercises of the Church were calculated to lead men blindfold as the vassals of the spiritual lords of Christendom. In Popish Churches the bible was not read and expounded, nor, before the reformation, were sermons preached, as in protestant countries is the common practice. The bible was withholden from the laity. The exercises of the temple were not fitted to enlighten the minds of men, nor to improve their hearts ; but were calculated to charm their senses, or to persuade them to resign their consciences and their purses to their ghostly fathers, as the means to prepare themselves for divine favour. The natural consequences of this degradation of the human understanding, of this blind submission to human authority, of this ignorance of the elementary principles of truth and moral science, were, that religion was made to consist in professions, which had no meaning, and in the pageantry of superstition, at the expense of reason, piety, and virtue.

4. The avowed perversion of the moral precepts of the gospel, must be reckoned among the corruptions of the Papal Hierarchy.

We often observe that much casuistry is employed to bring those vices which a man is unwilling to leave, within the bounds of lawful actions ; but

the Romanists went further : they corrupted moral principles, that they might give a religious sanction to practices the most base : they established as a ruling maxim, that the end sanctifies the means ; and that falsehood and fraud, in a good cause, are justifiable. The Pope, as the vicegerent of Christ, assumed the power to absolve men from oaths, and to dissolve at pleasure the bonds of allegiance between a people and their sovereign ; and he often exercised this power, where it produced parricide, treason, and every species of crime. But by the above maxims, Christian precepts themselves became a dead letter, and moral obligations were obliterated from the human mind. All engagements, for instance with hereticks, though made under the sanction of the most solemn oaths, were pronounced to have no binding force ; and, in all cases, those lies were deemed to be commendable, which were calculated to promote the interest of religion, meaning the honour and the power of the Papal throne. Under the administration of the Jesuits, the maxim, that the end sanctifies the means, had the greatest practical illustration, and proved a copious fountain of impiety and crime, of misery and disorder.

5. Private confessions of sins before the priests, and sales of indulgencies were among the abominable corruptions and abuses of the Romish Church.

In primitive times, Christian disciples confessed scandalous offences before the assembled brethren of their community. But in the fifth century, the Pope, the legislator and judge of the universal Church, enacted that confessions should be made to the priests in private ; and on condition that the

offender complied with the prescribed penance, the priest pronounced his pardon. Whatever distinctions the priest might make in his own mind; the deluded multitude conceived, that the offender made his confession to the priest as his judge—that the pardon of the priest implied the pardon of God ; and therefore the wounds of a guilty conscience were healed without repentance and reformation.

The next step was to take money from the offender, in place of the usual penance. To this succeeded the promulgation of the doctrine of indulgences. The practice commenced with the crusades. The Roman pontiff published a plenary indulgence to all who should die in the holy war : that is, he promised salvation to all, who should perish in this war, whatever might have been the moral course of their lives, or the religious state of their minds. Plenary indulgences were subsequently published to all who should die in any war denominated holy : that is, in a war waged against hereticks, or for the purpose of aggrandizing the head of the Church. In the twelfth century, the sale of indulgences became a source of great revenue, and was reduced to system. To afford a pretext for this abominable traffick, the following doctrine was published.—“ There actually exists an immense treasure of merit composed of the pious and virtuous actions, which the saints had performed beyond what was necessary for their own salvation, and which therefore are applicable to the benefit of others—that the Roman pontiff is the guardian and dispenser of this precious treasure ;

and that of consequence he is empowered to assign to such persons as he thinks proper, a portion of this inexhaustible fund of merit, suitable to their respective guilt, and sufficient to deliver them from the punishment due to their crimes." That these treasures of the Church might indeed appear to the world to be inexhaustible, the pontiff declared, that not only the works of supererogation of all saints, but also the infinite merits of Christ, are placed at the disposal of his holiness.

The Popes made a liberal use of this exhaustless fund. Besides indulgences to private individuals, Boniface VIII., when he instituted a jubilee for the year 1300, published a plenary or full indulgence for all sins that should be then committed. Julius II. granted indulgences to all, who should contribute towards building the Church of St. Peter, at Rome; and Leo X., in order to carry forward this magnificent structure, published indulgences and a full remission on the same condition. "Finding," says the historian, "the project take, he granted the right of promulgating these indulgences in Germany, together with a share in the profits arising from the sale of them, to Albert, Elector of Mentz and Archbishop of Magdeburg, who employed Tetzels, as his principal agent in retailing them, in his own territories; and Leo farmed out those of other countries to the highest bidders, who, to make the best of their bargains, procured the ablest of their preachers to extol the value of their ware. Happy times for sinners;" observes the historian, "their crimes were rated, and the remission of them set up to auction."

6. To maintain the despotism of Popery by depriving men of the knowledge necessary to defend themselves against spiritual imposition and abuse, the Roman court claimed the power not only to declare what constitutes heresy, and to punish individual hereticks, but also to prescribe what publications Christians might read, and what they might not. This restriction of religious liberty, and the punishment of men for opinions, must be ranked among the grossest abuses.

The comprehensive power claimed by the Papal Church, backed by the terrors of the inquisition, was exercised according to circumstances as they arose. Books, which one infallible Pope permitted to be read, his infallible successor prohibited. At the commencement of the reformation, this power was exercised with the utmost rigour. The judicious and candid Dr. Campbell, has the following remarks on this branch of Roman policy :—"A better expedient was never devised for employing religion so as not only to divest men of all knowledge, but of every vestige of rationality. So far did the Roman inquisition proceed, that under the authority of the Pope, they made a list of sixty-two printers, prohibiting all the books printed by them, of whatever authors, subject, or language, with an additional clause, still more comprehensive, to it—and all the books printed by such like printers. In consequence of which, there scarcely remained any books to read. Nay, to show the incredible excess of their rigour, the prohibition of every book, contained in their catalogue, was on pain of excommunication to the reader ; reserving to the Pope

the power of inflicting the deprivation of offices and benefices, incapacitation, perpetual infamy, and other arbitrary pains. Thus was the court of Rome in defence, as was falsely pretended, of the doctrine of Christ, but in reality, of her own despotism, engaged in a war against literature and knowledge, tending evidently to the extermination of arts and sciences, and to the transformation of men, in every thing but external form, into brutes."

Such was the thralldom of Christians, at the close of the fifteenth century. On those, who thus sat in darkness and the region of death, the light of the reformation arose.

SERMON X.

THE NATURE OF THE REFORMATION IN THE 16TH
CENTURY.

REVELATION xviii. 4.

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

THIS passage of scripture will be thought a suitable theme for the discussion of a distinct proposition on a very general subject, viz.—

The nature of the reformation effected in the sixteenth century.

In the year 1513, the son of Lorenzo de Medici, the Magnificent, the most distinguished family in Florence, was raised to the pontificate, and at his consecration, assumed the name of Leo X. He had been educated for the Church, possessed splendid talents, had acquired all the accomplishments of the age, and was celebrated for classical literature, and for his knowledge in the fine arts. He was highly polished in his manners, and had been accustomed to the most splendid style of living. He-

manifested a disposition liberally to encourage polite literature ; but he was fond of pleasure, loose in his religious character, and his belief of the truth of Christianity was, at least, equivocal.

At this period, the doctrines of Wicliffe, in England ; Waldus, Huss, and others, on the continent, had, by the most bloody persecutions, been suppressed ; and if the spirit of these reformers was not wholly subdued, their disciples were holden in derision and contempt. When Leo was placed on the Papal throne, the voice of opposition to his spiritual dominion was not heard. The civil governments of Europe were the ministers to support the universal supremacy of the Pope, and the whole community was holden in the most abject spiritual thralldom.

But causes for years had been secretly operating to prepare the human mind for a revolution in the religious establishment of Christendom. Men began to rise from the ignorance and debasement of the dark ages, which succeed the subversion of the Roman empire. Printing had been in use for almost a century. The writings of the first Christian fathers had been printed, and extensively circulated. Many perused them, and not a few were able to compare the state of the primitive Church with that of their own times ; and to perceive that great corruptions and abuses had been introduced.—The licentiousness of the clergy became notorious, and the impositions of the Church were heavily felt. But Pope Leo, surrounded by his obsequious cardinals, immersed in pleasure, or engrossed with schemes of aggrandizement, perceived none of

these signs of the times ; but mistook the universal silence for the spirit of tame submission ; and thought that no limit would be put to the means he might adopt to provide a revenue adequate to the accomplishment of all his lofty views.

The Papal treasury had been exhausted by the extravagance of his immediate predecessor. The magnificent cathedral of St. Peter, at Rome, was then in part erected, and a large amount of funds was necessary to complete this structure ; and the prodigality, the munificence, and the plans of family aggrandizement of the pontiff himself demanded a still greater amount of ways and means. The immense income from all the common resources of the Papal throne, which had almost drained Europe, were found insufficient for his wants, and he had recourse to every measure to fill the treasury, which cunning and cupidity could devise. Among the most corrupt of these measures, was the traffick of indulgences. Leo pushed this trade to its utmost extent. In Germany, he farmed this branch of his revenue to Albert, Elector of Mentz and Archbishop of Magdeburg, who employed Tetzels, a bold monk, to preach and vend these indulgences. The monk executed his commission with the greatest effrontery and scandal. He proclaimed the pardon of all sins, past, present, and to come, to all who would purchase the indulgences of Pope Leo—asserted that these had more efficacy than the merit of Christ—and declared that he had, by their distribution, saved more souls from hell, than the apostle Peter had, by his preaching, converted to Christianity. This was one essential link in the

chain of causes which produced the reformation in Germany, an event the most important and beneficial to the world, that has taken place since the establishment of Christianity. This abuse of every thing sacred—this open violation of all moral obligations, roused the indignation of Martin Luther, a man of the most powerful mind and intrepid character.

Luther was a native of Eisleben, in Saxony. He early discovered an inclination for learning, and was publicly educated at the university of Urfurt. By the force of his own mind, he rose above the scholastick and useless modes of instruction common to his age, and taught philosophy and ethicks on rational principles. Devoting himself to the department of theology, he studied the bible with unwearied diligence, in the original languages, and encouraged the cultivation of the like study in others, as the only sure foundation on which a true knowledge of religion could be built; and in life and conversation he was moral and exemplary. “Having passed his probation in the monastery of Urfurt, he took the monastick vows, and was admitted to priest’s orders. His profound learning, the purity of his life, and his knowledge of the scriptures were generally known and applauded, and in the year 1508, Frederick, Elector of Saxony, appointed Luther, then only twenty-five years of age, to the professorship of philosophy, and soon after, to that of divinity, in the university of Wittēmburg. The duties attached to these offices he discharged with so much ability, and a method so totally different from the usual mechanical and dull forms of lec-

turing, that he was crowded with pupils from all quarters ; and he greatly contributed in raising this university to celebrity. Being at Rome, in the execution of an important commission, Luther there had opportunity to examine the manner in which the Church of Rome was governed, and to observe the manners of the clergy. These he censured with severity, and particularly the careless and hasty manner which they adopted in performing divine service. The manner in which they were accustomed to offer up prayers to Almighty God, he declared, excited in his breast sentiments of astonishment and horror.

The infamous proceedings of the monk Tetzel, in vending indulgences, roused Luther to vigorous efforts in opposition to the intolerable abuses of the agents of the Roman pontiff. This may be considered as the commencement of that revolution in the Christian Church, which humbled the pride, and greatly reduced the power of the Papal Hierarchy. In the year 1517, this intrepid apostle of the reformation, with all the energy of his active mind, and all the vehemence of his ardent spirit, from the great Church in Wittemburg, attacked the vile traffick and the vicious lives of those, who were thus deluding their fellow beings in the highest interests of immortality. He brought their doctrines to the test of scripture, and exhorted Christians to seek their salvation by the methods which God had prescribed in the revelation of his will. The fervour and pungency of his appeal to reason and scripture, deeply impressed the minds of

his hearers. Multitudes attended his ministrations, and became converts to his doctrines.

Not satisfied with enlightening his countrymen from the pulpit, Luther proceeded to bolder exertions in the cause of Christian truth. He wrote to the Elector Albert, expostulating with him on the corrupt opinions and wicked conduct of those, whom he employed in the distribution of indulgences, and in pathetick language beseeching him to put an end to their abominable traffick, and to adopt efficient measures to reclaim the clergy from their profligate lives. But the love of gain was predominant in the mind of Albert, and he was unmoved by the remonstrances of Luther. Not succeeding with the Archbishop, Luther wrote ninety-five theses, on the points in controversy, which he proposed as subjects of inquiry and disputation; these he posted up in a Church in Wittenburg, and challenged the learned publickly to appear on a given day, as his opponents, either in person or by writing. No person appearing at the appointed time, Luther transmitted the theses to Pope Leo, with a letter, expressing his profound veneration for his holiness, and solemnly protesting his readiness to submit implicitly to the authority of the apostolick see.

It does not appear that Luther at this period entertained the thought of separating himself from the Papal Church, or of denying the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome. Thus far the dispute rested with Tetzel and Luther, respecting the power of the pontiff to pardon the sins of men. Luther acknowledged that the Roman pontiff possessed power to

remit all the punishments inflicted by the Church against transgressors ; but he denied that the Pope was clothed with authority to remit the punishments which God had denounced against the sinner. On the other side, Tetzel asserted that all punishments, present and future, human and divine, were within the power of the Pope to absolve, as vicegerent of Christ. Questions of this nature had before been canvassed in the Church, but the sovereign pontiffs had possessed so much discernment and policy as to leave them unsettled by any decree of the conclave. Had Leo, on this occasion, observed the same caution, restrained the scandalous abuses of Tetzel, and enjoined silence on the monks respecting Papal power, it is probable that Luther would have acquiesced, remained a member of the Romish Church, and that his name would not have been transmitted to posterity as a reformer. But Leo, in his imagined security, viewed Luther as an object of insignificance, and took no notice of him.

Luther's theses, in the mean time, were published and spread through Germany ; and they every where attracted attention, and were by many applauded.

At length, numerous advocates for the holy Church appeared, and with the utmost asperity attacked the writings and the person of Luther. Supported by Frederick, his sovereign, he undauntedly defended his cause and his character ; and now proceeded so far as to declare, "that if the Pope and cardinals entertained the same opinions with his opponents, and set up any authority against that of scripture, there could be no doubt but that Rome

was itself the very seat of Antichrist, and that it would be happy for those countries which should separate themselves from her.”

By the urgent representations of the emperor, and other distinguished characters, of the dangerous tendency of Luther's opinions, Pope Leo was induced to issue an order for his appearing at Rome, to justify himself. Men known to be hostile were appointed as his judges. By the influence of Frederick the wise, the petition of the reformer, that he might be heard at Augsburg, was granted ; but his avowed enemy, cardinal Cajetan, was empowered to try the merits of the controversy. In October, 1518, Luther arrived at Augsburg, and was admitted into the presence of Cajetan ; but the cardinal refused to hold debate with a man so much his inferiour in rank, and peremptorily demanded of Luther to retract, in an unqualified manner, the heretical opinions he had advanced, and to submit unreservedly to the judgment of the Pope. Luther replied that he could not with a safe conscience renounce opinions which he verily believed to be true ; and that no earthly consideration should induce him to do what would be base in itself, and offensive to his God. But he declared himself ready to submit to the lawful determinations of the Church. And further, he offered to submit the whole subject in controversy to certain universities ; and promised in the mean time neither to write nor preach on indulgences, on condition that the same silence was enjoined on his adversaries. The cardinal scornfully rejected all his proposals, insisted on a full recantation, and forbid Luther his presence,

unless he came prepared to comply with this requirement. Luther was not disposed to yield to this demand, and privately retired from Augsburg, leaving "a solemn appeal from the Pope, who was then ignorant of his cause, to the Pope, at a time when he should have received a more full and explicit information with respect to it."

Leo, learning the issue of this interview, issued a bull, by which he attempted, on Papal authority, to settle the controversy. In this publick instrument, he fully asserted the efficacy of indulgences, and imperiously demanded of all Christians to assent to his decisions, as the true doctrine of the holy Catholic Church.

Luther, seeing the storm that was gathering around him, gave a challenge to all the inquisitors to come to Wittemburg, and hold a publick disputation with him; offering them, in the name of Frederick, Elector of Saxony, a safe conduct, and promising them liberal entertainment during their residence with him. And as the only remedy for Papal censure, he appealed from the Pope to a general council, which he maintained was superior in authority to the pontiff.

The Roman pontiff, learning the indiscretion of cardinal Cajetan, and fearing that his own measures were too rash, constituted Miltitz, a Saxon knight, to be his legate, and under his authority, to hold a conference with Luther. Miltitz, a member of the court of Leo, a man of deep penetration, of mild temper, and persuasive address, was indefatigable in his endeavours to bring the reformer to submission. By remonstrance, flattery, and persuasion,

he greatly softened Luther, who not only promised to observe a profound silence in future, on the subject of indulgences, on condition that the same silence was imposed on his adversaries, but also engaged to write an humble letter to his holiness, acknowledging that his zeal and opposition had been intemperate and blameable. A letter of this import he actually wrote. At the same time, Luther proposed publishing a circular letter, exhorting his followers to reverence and obey the mandates of the holy Roman Church.

This was greater condescension than could have been expected from a man of Luther's resolute mind and obstinate temper; and it furnished the Papal court with a second opportunity to have silenced their formidable adversary. But before Miltitz could bring this conference to a favourable issue, a zealot of the Romish Church commenced an attack on the reformer, in such a violent manner as roused his indignation, drove him to more bold assaults against the Papal throne, and put an end to the reasonable prospect of healing the breach in the Church, but by the destruction of Luther.

A providential event at this period favoured Luther. The Emperor Maximilian died. The Elector of Saxony, by the Germanic constitution, was vicariat in that country during an interregnum; and under his auspices, the reformer enjoyed safety.

During the year 1518, Luther publicly disputed at Leipsic, with the celebrated controversialist, Eckius. In the course of this famous disputation, Luther affirmed, that in the earlier ages of

Christianity the Church of Rome was not considered superior to other Churches ; and on the authority of scripture, the writings of the fathers, authentick ecclesiastical history, and even the decrees of the council of Nice, denied all the lofty claims of that Church and its lordly Bishop. Hoffman, the president of the disputation, refused to declare victory to either party, but left the decision to the universities of Paris and Urfurt. The audience, however, declared in favour of the reformer ; and Eckius, by the resentment and deadly hatred which he manifested towards Luther, proclaimed that he felt himself beaten.

Soon after this event, Philip Melancthon, and Uric Zuinglius, joined the ranks of the reformers, and Erasmus evidently favoured their cause—men the most distinguished of their age. Now the march of the reformation became more bold and open.

Eckius, on his defeat at Leipsic, repaired to Rome with his complaints ; and, by his instigations, Leo was at length induced to assemble the college of cardinals to prepare a sentence of excommunication against Luther. On the 15th June, 1520, the bull was issued. In it, forty-one propositions, collected from the reformer's works, were condemned as heretical, all persons were forbidden to read his works, and they, who possessed any of them, were commanded to burn them. Luther, himself, if he did not within sixty days renounce his errors, and burn his books, was pronounced an obstinate heretic, excommunicated, and delivered over to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh ; and all secular

princes, under pain of incurring the same censure, were required to seize his person, that he might be punished as his crimes merited.

Luther, learning the decision of the conclave against him, deliberately prepared himself for his defence. As Pope Leo had burnt his works, Luther, surrounded by an immense multitude of all ranks, burnt, in the environs of Wittemburg, the pontiff's bull, and the decrees and canons respecting the supremacy and dominion of the Bishop of Rome. He next collected from the canon law the most extravagant propositions respecting the extent of Papal power, and the subordination of all civil authority to the see of Rome. These he published, with pointed comments, shewing their arrogance, their impiety, and their inconsistency with the existence of civil authority. Within one month after this publication, a second bull was fulminated against him from the conclave, by which he was expelled from the communion of the Church, for having insulted the majesty and disowned the supremacy of the Roman pontiff.

Being thus excommunicated, Luther employed himself in forming a system of doctrines and rules of discipline for a Church, conformable to his views of the New Testament, which was established, and exists to this day, under the denomination of the Lutheran Church.

Charles V., having succeeded his grandfather as Emperor of Germany, one of the first acts of his administration was to summon a diet of the empire, to be assembled in January, 1521, at Worms; and the express purpose of the meeting was, to concert

the proper measures to check the progress of these new and dangerous opinions, which threatened to disturb the peace of Germany, and to overthrow the religion of their ancestors. When the diet was opened, the Pope's legates insisted that the assembly was bound without deliberation to condemn the man whom the Roman pontiff had already excommunicated as an obstinate heretick. The emperor expressed his readiness to comply with the measure; but the elector of Saxony, the faithful friend of Luther, plead that he ought to be tried by the canons of the Germanic Church, and by the laws of the empire. In pursuance of this advice, the diet resolved that Luther should be summoned before their body, and allowed an hearing before sentence was pronounced on his cause. The consequent summons the reformer determined to obey. From this resolution his friends endeavoured to dissuade him, reminding him that a plighted faith was not observed with a heretick; and though he received a solemn assurance of security, and a safe conduct was sent him from the emperor, yet this was not deemed a foundation of confidence; and they referred to the reformer Huss, who was executed with an emperor's safe conduct in his hands. To this remonstrance Luther replied, "I am lawfully called to appear at Worms, and thither will I go, in the name of the Most High God, though as many devils as there are tiles on the houses, were there combined against me." On the 16th of April, Luther arrived at Worms, where crowds of people were assembled to behold him, and where he in

general received the most respectful treatment.— Before the diet, he plead the cause of Christian truth and liberty with much self-possession and great force of argument—but all to no effect.— Some of the assembly proposed to seize the opportunity of his presence, and at once to rid the Church of so pestilent an heretick ; but the emperor refused to forfeit his plighted word. No sooner, however, had he left the city, than in the emperor's name, and by the authority of the diet, a severe edict passed against him, by which he was pronounced an obstinate heretick, a member cut off from the Church, deprived of the privileges which he had enjoyed as a member of the empire ; and the heaviest punishments were denounced against those, who should receive, entertain, or countenance him, either by acts of hospitality, by conversation, or writing ; and all were required to give their aid in seizing his person as soon as the term of his safe conduct should expire.”

Regardless of these anathemas, Luther prepared to publish his translation of the bible, which was extensively circulated in Germany, and produced astonishing effects on the minds of the people. A number of the princes, and a large portion of the population, adopted the principles of Luther, and formed a confederacy to support the reformed Churches.

In June, 1526, a diet of the empire was holden at Spires, in which the influence of the reformers was so great, that a resolution passed, that till a general council should be convened, the princes and states of the empire should, in their respective

dominions, be at liberty to manage ecclesiastical concerns in the manner they should deem the most expedient. But this tranquillity was not of long duration. A new diet was assembled in 1529, and the former edict was revoked, and a decree passed, that every change from the established religion should be considered as unlawful. Against this decree all the friends of the reformation remonstrated; and from the protest they then made, the name of Protestants is derived. The emperor determined to enforce the edict by the sword. Protestants, in consequence of the war that issued, were exposed to severe sufferings; but the emperor found insurmountable difficulties in the attempt to subdue the opposition to the Roman pontiff; and after frequent changes among the German princes had taken place, and many conflicting interests had appeared, the emperor became discouraged, and in 1552, he concluded a treaty of pacification, which secured the German protestants in their Christian liberty. In 1555, the diet of the empire assembled at Augsburg, and ratified the treaty of the emperor Charles. This was denominated the peace of religion; and by it a great portion of Germany was separated from the authority of the Pope, and left in quietness to worship God agreeably to the dictates of a conscience enlightened in his word. At least, no restraint was imposed after this period, by the Roman pontiff. This was thirty-eight years from the time that Luther attacked Tetzels for his abominable traffick in indulgences.

SERMON XI.

THE EXTENT OF THE REFORMATION IN THE 16TH
CENTURY.

JUDE, 3d verse.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

THE professors of the Christian religion are, in the New Testament, denominated saints. By FAITH, in our text, the apostle includes the whole system of the gospel, in its doctrines and precepts, its examples and institutions, its promises and threatenings.

Having already, under the fourth proposition of our subject, reviewed the causes which produced the separation of protestants from the Romish Church, and considered the nature of the reformation, I shall this morning, my Christian brethren, direct your attention to its extent.

Great research and close reflection are necessary to enable any one to form a correct judgment of the extent of the reformation of the six-

teenth century, and duly to appreciate the efforts of its authors. To form right opinions of the characters of the reformers, and to estimate the real merit of their labours, we must take into view the circumstances of their education, the customs and habits of the age in which they lived, and the disadvantages under which they acted. Take Luther as the great example. In an age comparatively dark, he so far enlightened his own mind as to perceive the corruptions, the abuses, and the impositions of the Church of which he had been a devoted member. Being himself a priest of eminence, he participated in the emoluments of the hierarchy, and yet he had the honesty to proclaim the domination, the venality and wickedness of the pretended viceroy of Christ, and of the holy universal Church. Though all the authority and all the vengeance of the Roman empire and of the Papal throne were combined for his destruction, yet he persisted resolutely in his defence of Christian liberty and Christian truth; and by the blessing of God, he triumphed over all opposition. His name is identified in every country with the reformed religion, and will be venerated and esteemed in every subsequent age, by all who prize religious freedom, and set a value on religious privileges.

“Martin Luther’s life,” says bishop Atterbury, “was a continued warfare. He was engaged against the united forces of the Papal world, and he stood the shock of them bravely, both with courage and success. He was a man certainly of high endowments of mind and great virtues. He had a vast understanding, which raised him to a pitch of learn-

ing unknown to the age in which he lived. His knowledge in scripture was admirable, his elocution manly, and his way of reasoning, with all the subtilty that the plain truths he delivered would bear. His thoughts were bent always on great designs, and he had a resolution to go through with them, and the assurance of his mind was not to be shaken or surprised. His life was holy, and, when he had leisure for retirement, severe. His virtues were active chiefly, and social, and not those lazy sullen ones of the cloister. He had no ambition but in the service of God; for other things, neither his enjoyments nor wishes ever went higher than the bare conveniences of living. If, among this crowd of virtues, a failing crept in, we must remember that an apostle himself had not been irreproachable: if, in the body of his doctrine, a flaw is to be seen, yet the greatest lights of the Church, and in the purest times of it, were, we know, not exact in all their opinions. Upon the whole, we have certainly great reason to break out in the language of the prophet, and say, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who bringeth glad tidings."

Every man who has independence enough to form his religious opinions on the result of examination, and openly to confess the articles of his belief—who feels an interest in the rights of conscience, and finds satisfaction in the quiet worship of his God, according with the dictates of his own mind, will ever hold the reformers in the highest estimation, and embalm their memories with the incense of gratitude. But it must be remembered

that they were fallible men. They made no claims to inspiration. They lived in an age of great ignorance. Science and literature were then but rising from a state of the deepest depression; and their means of general information were very limited. In religion, they had been educated in all the superstitions of the Romish Church, and entered into active life with unbounded notions of Papal power, and with an almost sacred reverence for the decisions of the Church. Under circumstances like these, is it a reasonable supposition that they should at once rise above the prejudices of early education, eradicate the errors that had been the most deeply rooted in their minds, surmount the embarrassments which impeded their progress in the pursuit of truth, and, in the course of a few years, comprehend Christianity in all its doctrines, precepts, and motives? No. We might as well expect that in one season every vestige of an extended forest would, by the labour of an individual, be removed, and in its place would appear all the fruits of the most perfect cultivation. Hear what Luther says of himself, in an address to those who might peruse his works.—“ I entreat you to read my writings with cool consideration, and even with much pity. I wish you to know that when I began the affair of indulgences, I was a monk, and a most mad Papist. So intoxicated was I, and drenched in Papal dogmas, that I would have been most ready at all times to murder, or assist in murdering any person, who should utter a syllable against the Pope. I was always earnest in defending doctrines I professed. I went seriously to

work, as one who had a horrible dread of the day of judgment, and who from his inmost soul was anxious for his salvation. You will find, therefore, in my earliest writings, with how much humility, on many occasions, I gave up considerable points to the Pope, which I now detest as blasphemous and abominable in the highest degree. This error my slanderers may call inconsistency; but you, my pious readers, will have the kindness to make some allowance, on account of the times, and my own inexperience. I stood absolutely alone at first, and certainly was very unlearned, and very unfit to undertake matters of such vast importance. It was by accident, not willingly or by design, that I fell into those violent disputes. God is my witness."

That the reformers, under all the embarrassments of their situation, should have broken asunder so many of the cords of Papal thralldom, and corrected so many of the abuses and errors of the Romish Church, must ever astonish the world; but to bound the reformation where they left it, and to make them the standards of orthodoxy in every subsequent age, is preposterous.

That the subject may be the more clearly presented to your minds, I will prosecute the inquiry into the extent of the reformation, under three distinct branches.

1. The power exercised in the government of ecclesiastical affairs.

2. The ceremonies and exercises to be adopted in the publick worship of God. And

3. The doctrines that were inculcated and established as the essential truths of revelation.

It is not necessary to remark, that the reformers denied the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.— They denied that Popes and general councils were either infallible or supreme judges in concerns of religion : they declared the scriptures to be the sole law of Christians ; and they submitted its interpretation to the enlightened conscience and sound judgment of each individual disciple. The grand principle, the permanent foundation of the reformed religion, is the sufficiency of scripture as a rule of faith and practice, and the right of private judgment in matters of religion. To the support of the sufficiency of scripture, and the right of private judgment, Luther devoted his talents, his reputation, and his life. The truth of these positions he proved by arguments, which all his adversaries could neither confute nor invalidate. This proof remains in its full force, though the practice of the first reformers and of most of their successors has been quite inconsistent with the principle. By it Luther has transmitted an imperishable reputation. The sufficiency of scripture, and the right of private judgment, is the very soul of protestantism. These principles have, at least in theory, been admitted by all denominations of protestants through every century since the days of Luther ; and as long as these are admitted even as speculative truths, Christian liberty, at least in its root, will have vitality. The ambition of civil rulers may, in one country, smother its growth ; and in another, the contention of different denominations of professors for superiority and dominion, may destroy

its shoots ; but it will still retain life, and as prejudices are conquered, in the progress of general improvement, it will grow to its full strength, put forth its rich foliage, and yield its divine fruit.

But with sorrow and pain we review the weakness and inconsistency of man, in this most sacred transaction. Luther, and all the other reformers, denied absolutely that any human power might authoritatively settle the articles of Christian faith : they separated themselves from the existing Hierarchy, and claimed the liberty to form their own system of faith, and to establish their own forms of worship ; and at the same time, they quarrelled with each other about its exercise, and denied it to all who opposed their systems. They individually were disposed to exercise dominion over the faith of their fellow disciples, and to lord it over the heritage of God. The power to prescribe articles of faith which they arrested in the hand of the Roman pontiff, they assumed themselves ; and the authority which they denied to civil government to enforce the decrees of the Pope among Catholick nations, they transferred to the civil governments in protestant countries, and required them by penal statutes to enforce their own creeds and formularies.

At that age, Christian liberty was not understood by any class of men, and religious toleration was no where allowed. The creed and confession of Luther were established by the civil authority of all the German princes who adopted his system.—Wherever the Lutheran religion was received, these creeds and confessions were made the laws of the land, and opposition to them was punished as

crimes committed against the state. Similar remarks will apply to other reformers. Their articles of faith and their plans of Church government were adopted and supported by civil authority.—By the power of the civil magistrate, Calvin burnt Servetus, at Geneva, for heresy.

The reformation in England, as it respects power, was merely nominal. Henry VIII. assumed the ecclesiastical sceptre which he tore from the sovereign pontiff. His supremacy in religion was supported by acts of parliament, and the nature of his ecclesiastical government may be understood by the following six articles, which were formally enacted and kept in force during his reign. I will adopt the language of the historian :—

“ The king being sensible of the good of union, and of the mischief of discord in points of religion, had come to the parliament in person, and had opened many things of high learning there ; and that with the consent of both houses, he sent forth these articles.

1. That in the sacrament there was no substance of the bread and wine, but only the natural body and blood of Christ.

2. That Christ was entirely in each kind, and so communion in both was not necessary.

3. That priests, by the law of God, ought not to marry.

4. That vows of chastity, taken after the age of twenty-one, ought to be kept.

5. That private masses were lawful and useful.

6. That auricular confession was necessary, and ought to be retained.

These articles were thus solemnly proclaimed as essential Christian verities. Practical opposition to any of them, persisted in, was made a capital offence, and many were in consequence executed. Even Lambert, a priest of learning, judgment, and moral life, was solemnly tried before the king, the nobles, and bishops of the realm, for denying the real presence; was condemned, and finally burnt. In the reign of Edward VI. the learned, the pious and good Archbishop Cranmer, under the inveterate prejudice of early education, persuaded that young, but humane monarch, to give his sanction to burning a poor woman on a charge of heresy. The pious king, in tears, signed the death warrant, and pathetically said to the Archbishop, "Since I resign up myself in this matter to your judgment, if I sin in it, the sin must lie at your door."

In the reign of queen Elizabeth, the English episcopal Church was permanently established. But the supremacy was still vested in the sovereign; and in the opinion of many learned, judicious, and pious individuals, their forms, in some particulars, bear too near a resemblance to the superstitious rites and corrupt usages of the Church from which they separated. Indeed it has been pointedly remarked, that, in the English communion, we find, "a Papist liturgy, Calvinistick articles of faith, and an Arminian clergy."

Some of the above observations would, with more propriety, have fallen under the head of doctrines, but I thought it expedient at once to close our remarks on the reformation in England.

Our venerated ancestors, who first settled in America, while they were inhabitants of the mother country, claimed the right to form their faith from an examination of the sacred oracles; and they brought with them the true protestant principles of the sufficiency of scripture and the right of private judgment; but they also, in practice, discovered the inconsistency common to their age. They intimately incorporated Church and state, and denied to all dissentients from their system the rights of conscience. We see then that the reformation, as it respects the liberty of opinion and the rights of conscience, though in theory perfect, in reality was partial and limited.

The reformation of the sixteenth century, as it respected the ceremonies and exercises of publick worship, both among Lutherans and Calvinists, was thorough. Luther, almost without exception, removed the superstitious rites of the Papal Church. He reduced the number of sacraments to two, viz. baptism and the Lord's supper. He exploded the adoration of the host, oracular confession, purgatory, prayers to departed saints, and the worship of images. He also opposed monastick vows, the fasts of the Romish Church, and indulgences.

The reformers generally introduced publick forms of praise and prayer adapted to the intellectual, the spiritual worship of the Deity, and which had a direct tendency to cherish pious affections, and to render men the fit objects of divine favour. They also adopted an improved system of preaching, better calculated to enlighten the human mind, to improve the human heart, and to lead to pure morality in life and conversation.

Caution to avoid Popish errors, has, perhaps, in some instances, particularly among puritans, been carried to an extreme. Thus, that men might not fall into the Papistical practice of praying for the dead, neither prayers nor any religious exercise was customary at funerals. Our ancestors brought this caution, may I not say prejudice, with them into our country ; and for more than a century after their settlement here, prayers were not made at funerals. The first prayer made, and the first sermon preached at the obsequies of a deceased person in Boston, were at the funeral of the Rev. Dr. Mayhew, in the year 1766.

Objections have been often made to the congregational worship. It is thought to be too simple. In publick worship, we are told that there should be more ornament, more ceremonies to fix the attention, and to excite suitable emotions. But if we are at the opposite extreme of that of the Papists, experience, I think, shows that our extreme is the safest. Splendour of ornament, and redundance of ceremony have a tendency to engross the mind, and lead people to suppose that religious worship consists in mere external observances. When the form of worship is simple, the service may be the more intellectual and edifying, and the worship more spiritual and acceptable.

The reformation, as it respects Christian doctrines, will be the subject of our attention on a future occasion.

SERMON XII.

THE REFORMATION, AS IT RESPECTS DOCTRINES, WAS
PARTIAL.

1 TIMOTHY vi. 4, 5.

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness ; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings.

THE history of the Christian world furnishes the clearest illustration of our text. Whenever men, leaving the simplicity of the gospel, have attempted to embody the truths of revelation in human formularies, disputes, divisions and censoriousness have followed.

The nature and extent of the reformation, in the sixteenth century, have already been reviewed.—The particular branch of this subject, that I shall at this time discuss, is, the doctrines which were established by the reformers, as the fundamental truths of revelation.

Luther, and other reformers, made less changes in the doctrines, than in the rites and ceremonies of the Papal Church. Indeed, the degree in which they removed the corruptions that had been introduced, was very limited. Most of the articles of the Lutheran and Calvinistick systems had long been established by the authority of the holy mother Church.

The following may be taken as a summary of Luther's faith :—He denied the doctrine of free will, and asserted that in all men do, they act from necessity. He held that all the actions of men, in a state of nature, are sinful ; and that their virtues are crimes. He was a most strenuous advocate for the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist. On this subject, a long and bitter controversy existed between Luther and Zuinglius, of Switzerland—a controversy which occasioned a breach among the followers of these great men that was never healed. As it respects doctrinal points, there was not a material difference between the Lutheran and Calvinistick systems. I mention this now, because I shall presently show that all the leading doctrines of these systems were the established doctrines of the Papal Church. Melancthon was unquestionably more mild and liberal, and more reformed than Luther ; but he became not the head of any particular sect. Zuinglius was pre-eminently distinguished among the reformers of the sixteenth century. He, more than any other reformer, divested himself from the prejudice of a Popish education, carried into the study of the scriptures more sound principles of criticism, pos-

essed more of the spirit of his Master, and in his intercourse with his fellow Christians, displayed more of the charity of the gospel. Admiring his general character, I cannot restrain the inclination to present to your view an extract from his biography.

“ In the character of Zuinglius,” says his impartial biographer, “ there appears to have been united all that makes a man amiable in private society, with the firmness, ardour, and intrepidity that are indispensable in executing the great task of reformation. By nature mild, his earnestness was the result of the importance of the cause he engaged in to the best interests of mankind, not of a dogmatical or dictatorial spirit. His views were large and generous, and his opinions rose above the narrow scale of sect or party. It was no small proof of the liberality in that age, that he ventured to assert his belief of the final happiness of virtuous heathens, and of all good men who act up to the laws engraven on their own consciences. His temper was cheerful and social, somewhat hasty, but incapable of harbouring resentment, or indulging envy or jealousy. As a reformer, he was original ; for he had proceeded far in emancipating himself from the superstitions of Rome, by the strength of his own judgment, and had begun to communicate the light to others, whilst Luther still retained almost the whole of the Romish system, and long before Calvin was known in the world. He was more learned and more moderate than the first of these divines, and more humane and kind-hearted than the

last. He wrote many works of utility in their day ; and the reform, of which he was the author, still exists unchanged among a people distinguished by their morals and mental cultivation.

To this biographical sketch I will add, that when the Roman Catholick cantons of Switzerland, in arms invaded the territory of their reformed brethren, to force them to return within the pale of the Papal Church, Zuinglius went out with his countrymen in defence of Christian liberty, and perished on the field of battle. Desperately wounded, he was left senseless on the ground. A Roman Catholick soldier, who found him so far recovered as to cross his arms on his breast, and raise his eyes to heaven, offered to bring a confessor, and exhorted him to recommend his soul to the virgin Mary. Zuinglius declined the proposal, and the soldier furiously exclaimed, “ Die, then, obstinate heretick,” and pierced him through with his sword. A priest who had once been his colleague at Zurich, but who was his opponent as a reformer, intensely gazing on the corpse, proclaimed, “ Whatever may have been thy faith, I am sure thou wert always sincere, and that thou lovedst thy country. May God take thy soul to his mercy.”

A high claim in favour of the system of Calvinism is made in our country, on the declaration that this contains the doctrines of the reformation. The doctrine of the trinity, and the whole class of articles of faith, which with us are proudly denominated the orthodox creed, it is confidently affirmed, were the peculiar doctrines of the reformers ; and I doubt not that many are led to believe

that these articles of faith were embodied by Luther and Calvin, who purified them from the corruptions which were introduced into the doctrine of the gospel by the Roman pontiff. Nothing is more distant from the reality. The most that can be consistently affirmed is, that the reformers left these doctrines as they found them, on the formularies of the Papal Church. All these articles of faith were doctrines established by human authority, centuries before the birth of the reformers, and indeed long before the bishop of Rome claimed to be the infallible head of the universal Church. Take first the doctrine of the trinity.

In the commencement of the fourth century, a bitter controversy arose respecting the divinity of our Saviour. Christians of the eastern Church then formed themselves into two grand divisions, under the denomination of Trinitarians and Arians. Sometimes the ruling power of the state favoured one denomination, and sometimes the other; but whichever party predominated, their opponents were persecuted by expulsion from office, by banishment and by death, in violation of the spirit of our religion, and to the scandal of the Christian profession.

Before the middle of this century, the council of Nice was assembled. Until this time, no divine, I believe, had publickly asserted the equality of the Son with the Father. Though this council condemned the Arian doctrine, and decreed that the Son is of the same essence with the Father, yet many of the members held to the supremacy of the Father.

The divinity of the Holy Ghost was not deeply agitated in this council. But a prelate of the Church, having declared, that the Holy Ghost is “a divine energy diffused throughout the universe, and not a person distinct from the Father and the Son,” a general council convened at Constantinople in the year 381, pronounced this sentiment heretical. “An hundred and fifty bishops, who were present at this council,” says Mosheim, “gave the finishing touch to what the council of Nice had left imperfect, and fixed in a full and determinate manner, the doctrine of three persons in one God, which is yet received among the generality of Christians.”

In the subsequent age, angry disputes prevailed respecting the divine and human natures of Christ. From the controversies of the fourth century, the doctrine of the trinity assumed the Athanasian form, and from the Greek polemicks was handed down through the western Church to protestant professors. The article of faith on the doctrine, in the confessions of Augsburg and Dort, of the episcopal, the presbyterian, and congregational Churches, may be traced to the controversies of the fourth century.

With what propriety then can the doctrine of the trinity be called the doctrine of the reformation? In its present form it was established in an ignorant age of the Church; and it has been transmitted through succeeding centuries on the strength of human authority. All that can with truth be affirmed is, that the reformers did not materially alter this article of faith, which they found in the Papal establishment.

There is no more reason for denominating the doctrine of original sin, total depravity, irrespective decrees, special grace, and other articles of the Calvinistick creed, the doctrines of the reformation, than that of the trinity. These were the subjects of most bitter controversy as early as the fifth century. Hear the language of an ecclesiastical historian respecting the character of the theologians who introduced them.—“ Many points of religion were more largely explained, and many of its doctrines determined with more accuracy and precision, than they had been in the preceding ages. This was owing to the controversies that were multiplied at this time, throughout the Christian world, concerning the person and nature of Christ; the innate corruption and depravity of man; the natural ability of men to live according to the dictates of the divine law; the necessity of the divine grace in order to salvation; the nature and existence of human liberty, and other such intricate and perplexing questions. The sacred and venerable simplicity of the primitive times, which required no more than a true faith in the word of God, and a sincere obedience to his holy laws, appeared little better than rusticity and ignorance to the subtle doctors of this quibbling age. Yet so it happened, that many of the over curious divines, who attempted to explain the nature, and remove the difficulties of these intricate doctrines, succeeded very ill in this matter. Instead of leading men into the path of humble faith and genuine piety, they bewildered them in the labyrinths of controversy and contention, and rather darkened than illustrated the sacred mysteries

of religion, by a thick cloud of unintelligible subtleties, ambiguous terms, and obscure distinctions. Hence arose new matter of animosity and dispute, of bigotry and uncharitableness, which flowed like a torrent through succeeding ages, and which all human efforts seem unable to vanquish. In these disputes, the heat of passion, and the excessive force of religious antipathy and contradiction, hurried frequently the contending parties into the most dangerous extremes.”*

St. Augustin may perhaps be considered as the father of the articles of faith now denominated Calvinistick. He and his disciples maintained, “that a covenant was made with all mankind in Adam, as their first parent, and that he was to represent them all ; so that by his disobedience, they are all sinners, his act being imputed and transferred to them all.” That satisfaction was made to the justice of God by the death of Christ, and that men were justified by the imputed righteousness of the Saviour, were prevalent doctrines of this period.

Pelagius, a British monk, opposed these tenets, and for this opposition, his name has been transmitted as an Arch-heretick. What then were the opinions which have for centuries rendered the memory of this divine opprobrious in the Christian world ? Learn them from the authentick page of ecclesiastical history.—“ This monk looked upon the doctrines which were commonly received, concerning the original corruption of human nature, and the necessity of divine grace to enlighten the understanding and purify the heart, as prejudicial

* Mosheim, Cent. v. part ii. chap. 3.

to the progress of holiness and virtue, and tending to lull mankind in a presumptuous and fatal security. He maintained that these doctrines were as false as they were pernicious; that the sins of our first parents were imputed to them alone, and not to their posterity; that we derive no corruption from their fall, but are born as pure and unspotted as Adam came out of the forming hand of his Creator; that mankind, therefore, are capable of repentance and amendment, and of arriving to the highest degrees of piety and virtue, by the use of their natural faculties and powers; that indeed, external grace is necessary to excite their endeavours, but that they have no need of the internal succours of the Divine Spirit."

Against these sentiments, St. Augustin directed the full force of his vivid imagination and active mind; and principally, by his exertions, their prevalence was soon checked, and their author stigmatized as a heresiarch. In this age, the peculiarities of the creed, now denominated orthodox, was formed into a system, and transmitted through successive generations to the present time.

While Roman Catholick theologians confined their inquiries to metaphysical subjects, and advanced no position which interfered with the infallibility of Holy Mother Church, the pontiff seldom meddled with their disputations; and sometimes his edicts were opposed to the established faith on essential points of divinity. Thus the profitable traffick of indulgences led to declarations inconsistent with the doctrine of salvation by the imputed merits of Christ. To insure a reverence to the Church,

adequate to her exigences, the greatest efficacy was attributed to the indulgences of the Pope, and to the good works of Christian professors. Good works were pronounced to have merit in the sight of God. These would avail the individual who performed them, at the day of judgment, and insure his salvation. The merit of good works might be transferred from one individual to another, and was considered as an atonement for his sins, and by it he received a title to divine favour. What were the good works with which the Romish Church associated all this merit? Were they genuine expressions of a mind, meek, humble and resigned, under the dispensations of Divine Providence? Were they works of righteousness, benevolence, and mercy to mankind? Were men directed to commute for their sins, and to acquire a title to the favour of their Maker by living soberly, righteously, and piously? Were they exhorted to amass a stock of transferable merit by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God? No. The meritorious works of the Romish Church bore no resemblance to the moral virtues inculcated in the gospel. Men were taught confidently to expect for themselves pardon and salvation, and by their imputed merit to save the souls of others, as a reward for bestowing their worldly substance to found monasteries, to endow religious houses, to pay for prayers offered by priests to obtain the delivery of souls suffering in purgatory: in a word, to give their property to purposes of Papal aggrandizement. Luther clearly saw the delusion and danger to which men were exposed by

the Romish doctrine of merit, and in the endeavour to guard Christian disciples against them, he was carried to the opposite extreme. His statement of justification by faith alone, seems to imply, that, on the plan of the gospel, an observance of moral precepts is of no importance. Not satisfied that man can merit nothing of his Maker, and that on the merciful promise of God, the Christian finds his hopes of acceptance, as the reward of a sincere endeavour to do the divine will, Luther's remarks, in their obvious meaning, import that obedience to the moral laws of the gospel is neither the condition of salvation, nor a preparation for the society of heaven. He expressly asserts, "that not only were good works not necessary to salvation; but how good soever they might appear, they were mortal sins." And one of his followers, of the greatest celebrity, as expressly declares, "that good works are an impediment to salvation."—The language of many orthodox divines, on the subject of good works, from the period of the reformation, to our day, has been such, as would lead an uninformed hearer to suppose, that by yielding obedience to the divine commands, he should endanger his salvation. If the disciples of the reformers had, in a literal sense, received their comments on the demerit of the moral virtues, and adopted them as practical principles, they might consistently have sinned, that grace may abound.

The Lutherans soon purified the articles of their Church from some of the more exceptionable parts

of their founder's creed ; but at Geneva, the system, for ages, was retained in its original features, and therefore it has borne Calvin's name as its author. But, from authentick information, we learn, that, almost without exception, the present divines of Geneva have discarded the peculiarities of Calvinism, and have introduced purer articles of faith, and more liberal principles of ministerial and Christian intercourse and communion.

In New England, a large class of divines, who choose to bear the epithet, orthodox, deny the doctrine of imputation, and on several other points, differ materially from the system of Calvin ; yet, however they modify their faith, they style themselves Calvinists, and confidently maintain that they hold the peculiar doctrines of the reformation.

The reformers, as men, partook of the weakness of human nature : they received their religious education under the most corrupt establishment : all their early prejudices bound them to slavish submission to the decrees of a bishop, who was generally acknowledged as the vicegerent of Christ ; and the interest and power of Christendom were in a great measure combined to oppose every scheme of reforming the mother Church ; yet they possessed force of mind to break their thralldom, and resolution to oppose the corruptions and spiritual despotism by which Christian professors were debased and oppressed. While knowledge and truth, liberty and religion are regarded, the memory of the reformers will be venerated.

SERMON XIII.

THE DUTY OF PROTESTANTS.

COLOSSIANS i. 9, 10.

For this cause, we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

IT is unnecessary to mention that a very general subject has for weeks been under our consideration. The following propositions show the manner in which it has been treated.

1. The primitive state of the Christian community.
2. The manner in which ecclesiastical power and dominion were assumed by the Christian priesthood.
3. The rise and extent of the usurpation of the bishop of Rome; and the corruptions and abuses of the Papal Hierarchy.

4. The causes which produced the separation of protestants from the Romish Church ; and the nature and extent of the reformation in the sixteenth century.

5. The duty of protestants to act in consistency with their avowed principles, and to make progressive improvements in religious knowledge and moral life, corresponding with the light and the means of the age in which they live.

The last proposition I am this morning to consider, viz :—

5. The duty of protestants to act in consistency with their avowed principles, and to make progressive improvements in religious knowledge and moral life, corresponding with the light and the means of the age in which they live.

A man of a discriminating and unprejudiced mind, must feel some surprise in reviewing the present state of Christendom. Since the sixteenth century, the highest improvements have been made in all the exact sciences and in general literature. A comparison between that age and this, shows that the progress of the human mind, in the knowledge of personal rights, in the principles of civil government, and in every branch of science and philosophy, has been constant and rapid ; and in consequence, society is every where improved and refined. But the systems of school divinity of that period have been handed down through successive generations, to the present time, with a sanction which is due only to the oracles of truth. The great cause is, that those systems are supposed to contain the peculiar doctrines of the reformation ;

and therefore they are supported by all the veneration which Christians feel towards the men, who at the hazard of every enjoyment of life, and of life itself, freed them from the tyranny and bondage of the Papal Church. But we have clearly seen that the formularies now to be found amongst most denominations of Christians, are not the peculiar doctrines of the reformers. These were common to papists and to protestants. This fact furnishes no argument to prove them true or false. Papists and protestants hold many important and essential truths of revelation in common; but the fact shows, that these doctrines are entitled to no peculiar favour because they were holden by the reformers. The doctrines of the reformation must be those which distinguished protestants from papists, and which formed the line of separation between them—not those in which they were united. Shall I then be asked, What are the distinguishing marks between the reformers and those whom they opposed? I answer, they relate rather to practical abuses than to speculative errors. I answer in the words of a good writer.—“The great points on which the reformation turned, relate chiefly to the power of the clergy, the rights of Christians, and the rule and standard of Christian faith. The great errors against which the reformers directed their attacks, were the supremacy of the Pope—the derivation of his dignity from St. Peter—his power of forgiving sins—the infallibility of the Church—the authority of traditions, and of decrees of council—the efficacy of indulgences—the miracles and merits of saints—the veneration due to the fathers—the pro-

priety and obligation of monastick vows—the necessity of confession to the priest, and of receiving from him absolution—the power of prayer and alms over the souls in purgatory—the number and efficacy of the sacraments, which it was the province of the clergy to administer; and, above all, the propriety of withholding the scriptures from the common people.”

That men labouring under all the prejudices of a Popish education, and in an age of darkness and ignorance, should have had strength of mind to perceive the odious nature, and pernicious effects of the above stated abuses and impositions, and courage in their attempt to correct them—to oppose the most formidable power of the Roman pontiff—must excite our admiration; but it cannot be imagined, that men, who had grown even to the full vigour of manhood, amidst the grossest corruptions, and had deeply imbibed the false principles of the established religion, should at once perceive every false doctrine, and every pernicious abuse which it contained, and be immediately prepared to make a thorough reformation. Unless we admit that these men were inspired, which is not pretended, it cannot be presumed that they at once understood the whole counsel of God, as this is revealed in the scriptures, and immediately purified Christianity from all the corruptions introduced by the Papal Church. “It would be strange indeed,” to adopt the language of the venerable Robinson, the pastor of the Leyden flock, “if the earliest reformers should have passed from such entire darkness into perfect light, after such darkness had en-

dured for twelve hundred years." Having but imperfectly liberated themselves from monkish superstition and moral servitude, it is not possible that Luther and his fellow-labourers should have conformed their institutions to the letter and spirit of the gospel. Theologians, who have been educated under more favourable circumstances, and possess higher means of obtaining a correct knowledge of scripture, and acquiring the requisite knowledge of publick teachers, must be in a situation to make improvement on the first reformers, as it respects articles of Christian faith, modes of publick worship, and the forms of Church government and discipline. In fact, the doctrines and principles, which in this age are the subject of controversy and division, had slight, if any, connexion with the corruptions and abuses from which the first reformers relieved protestants.

The agitated, the heated spirit of the sixteenth century, was unfavourable to impartial investigation, to candid inquiry, and to the possession of opinions on speculative subjects, founded on deliberate and sound judgment.

While, then, Christians of the present day venerate the memories of those great and daring men, who began the reformation from Popery—while they cherish devout gratitude for the religious liberty and the religious blessings of which these men were the primary instruments—let not Christians of this period of greater light and knowledge take them as infallible guides, nor adopt their speculative systems as the body of revealed religion, from which there is no appeal. The systems of Luther, Cal-

vin, and their coadjutors are entitled to honourable notice as the opinions of great, honest, and pious men, who sought the truth in the love of it ; but they have not the authority of revelation, and are to be received only as, on due examination, they are found conformable to the sacred oracles. While we avail ourselves of every advantage which the noble exertions of the reformers have secured to us, let us not view them as the standard of perfection, and suppose that we must cease from further inquiry after the truths pertaining to eternal life, and rest our Christian faith and hope on their attainments. All the light with which they were favoured, shines around us ; and many and great advantages are afforded us, which were denied to them. We must account for all the talents committed to our management. Our progress, then, in Christian knowledge, and Christian life, should correspond to the means of general improvement with which we are favoured. The authority for the doctrines we believe should be drawn from the sacred scriptures, not from the creed of Luther, Zuinglius, or Calvin. Christ is the only lawgiver in his kingdom. The scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith. Every intelligent Christian forms his opinions of revealed truths from an impartial and diligent study of them.

Should the inquiry be urged—On what points is it the duty of Christians of the present day particularly to make improvements ?

I answer,

1. They are bound to display the practical effects of protestant principles in a higher degree than

these have as yet been manifested in the Christian world.

The reformers, in their dispute with the Romish Church, took the most tenable ground, which they maintained with all the force of argument, and all the power of truth, viz.—“The sufficiency of scripture as a rule of faith and practice, and the right of private judgment.” But no sooner had they separated a large portion of the Christian community from the Catholick communion, than they, in direct violation of their own principles, assumed the spiritual domination over their protestant brethren from which they themselves revolted, under the Roman pontiff. By their own authority they established formularies as the test of orthodoxy, and they denied the Christianity of all who dissented from them. Luther was strenuous to deprive the individual of every Christian privilege, and every worldly blessing, who denied the real presence of Christ in the eucharist; and Calvin burnt Servetus for denying the doctrine of the trinity, that there were three persons in the godhead. The spirit of Popery is not yet banished from the Christian Church. How many, in the present day, judge of the Christianity of their brethren, not by their profession of a belief in the divine origin of our religion—not by an adoption of the scriptures as the standard of faith and the rule of conduct—not by a life and conversation which become the gospel—but by their embracing the creed of this or the other human master in theology. These things, my candid hearers, ought not so to be.

To what cause are we indebted for the great improvements, which have been made in most branches of science and philosophy? To the liberty which scientifick men have enjoyed fearlessly to examine established systems, to bring theories to the test of experiment, and to publish the result of their investigations without hazarding their personal safety, or their worldly interest. The same liberty of inquiry and publication would produce the like beneficial effects in theology. Great is the power of truth, and when its investigation is least shackled by human authority, it will most prevail. Let, then, the disciple of Jesus Christ in reality, in practice, grant his Christian brother the liberty of judgment which he claims for himself. Let him not view his brother less worthy as a man, or the less pure as a Christian—let him not love him the less, because his inquiries into the sacred oracles result in the adoption of opinions which differ from his own; but if he, by an exhibition of the fruits of the gospel, prove that he loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, let the hand of charity be extended to him. Then will the Christian community cease from strife, and the unity of the spirit will be preserved in the bond of peace.

2. It is the duty of those who deny human authority in the concerns of religion, who have the most thoroughly freed themselves from the prejudice of party, and risen above the exclusive spirit of a sect, to appear openly the advocates of the great interests which at heart they approve, and publickly to support the system which they believe to be true.

The present situation of the Christian community in our country renders this independent avowal of opinion the more incumbent. It cannot be denied that systematick measures are now zealously prosecuted to check the prevalent spirit of inquiry, to restrain the exercise of private judgment, and to deny Christian fellowship to all who refuse assent to an human creed. This remark is not made from any apprehension that the attempt to lord it over the heritage of God, will finally succeed. The nature of our publick institutions, and the genius of the people of our country, forbid the supposition.—Did I singly regard the extensive prevalence of that system of Christian opinions which I embrace, I could not desire more efficient pioneers to remove the impediments which retard its progress, than the anathemas and excommunications which are now threatened. The thought of crushing liberal Christianity, as many denominate it, by ecclesiastical censures, is idle. But I am appalled by a view of the temporary evils which must arise from the attempt. Angry disputes will prevail, and those divisions may take place, which must paralyze the strength of many of our parishes, and leave no denomination the ability to support the publick institutions of the gospel. Evils, then, may follow of which we may be awfully afraid. Means will be wanting to maintain a pious and learned ministry : destitute parishes will be left open to impressions from ignorant and enthusiastick itinerants ; and the worst evils of party, and the most extravagant excesses of fanaticism, it must be expected, will prevail.

Let the voices, then, of all who discountenance an exclusive spirit among Christians, be lifted up against it, that the advocates for separation may be convinced that they have not the overwhelming majority of the intelligence, the piety, the zeal, and sincerity of the community, which promise success to their measures. Let those in the Christian ministry, who bear the title of orthodox, be told, that if they, in an unchristian manner, separate from their more liberal brethren, their liberal parishioners will separate from them. Then they may perceive the danger of their own plan, and may be induced to desist from its prosecution. They then may be inclined to inquire, not respecting points on which Christians differ, that they may divide—but in which they agree, that they may be united. The Christian ground, which is common, is so broad, that all may stand on it, and be fellow-labourers in promoting the true interests of the kingdom of Christ, the Lord of all.

3. It is the duty of those, who verily think that they have purified their Christian faith from human corruptions, and that they hold the truths of the gospel in their simplicity and purity, to maintain a more consistent profession, and to exhibit more of the practical fruits of their religion.

Papists were incessantly goading the first reformers with charges of laxity of principle, and a disregard to the vital interests of the Christian Church; of breaking down all the barriers, that the wolf might enter the fold, and destroy the flock. Precisely the same complaints the orthodox now make against unitarians. You give up one doctrine after

another—where will you stop? You deny the truth of essential articles—what do you believe? You are blinded by the pride of philosophy, and are passing down the “stream of error to the gulf of perdition.” Thus impeached, it becomes the imperious duty of unitarian professors to make it manifest that their dissent from more common opinions arises not from the spirit of opposition, but the love of truth; not from indifference to religion, nor a fondness for latitudinarian principles, but from a superiour regard to the instruction of Christ, our common Lord and Master. They are bound to make it apparent, that they yield a cheerful, an unreserved submission to the authority of revelation; and endeavour, in the sober use of reason, to comply with the apostolick direction—“Judge ye what I say.” Let them show that they deem it their most sacred obligation to study diligently the scriptures, that they may learn and embrace the true doctrines of the gospel; at the same time, that they believe and assert, that men, differing in their mental powers and advantages for biblical knowledge, may, in this examination, form different opinions, and still be sincere and sound Christians.

Above all, let enlightened Christians prove that they prize revelation as the richest gift of God, by an uniform obedience to the commands of their divine Lord. Let them statedly attend on the institutions of publick worship—celebrate the death of the friend who sacrificed his life for their salvation—support a Christian profession by general practice and conversation, which become the gospel—and

adorn their respective stations in society with virtues the most appropriate and the most useful.

In their intercourse with the members of the Christian family, let the enlightened and liberal disciple of Jesus Christ discover a forbearing and charitable temper, and manifest a disposition to meet those who in speculative doctrines differ from him, in the endeavour to promote the great design of the gospel.

In this manner, let unitarians cause their light to shine before men ; and may all who see their good works, become the followers of them, as far as they are the followers of Christ.

SERMON XIV.

THE SYSTEM OF CALVINISM.

1 THESSALONIANS, v. 21.

Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.

UNDER this apostolick direction, my purpose is to review the Calvinistick system of theology.

Calvin may perhaps be ranked as the second in point of talent and activity, of zeal and influence, among the distinguished reformers.* He was born in a province of France, in the year 1509. Educated with a view to the priesthood, while young, he was introduced to office in the cathedral church belonging to the place of his nativity. From thence he soon removed to Paris, where he distinguished himself in various branches of literature. In this city, the diligent study of scripture, and the conversation of several men of enlightened minds, led him to embrace the primary principles of the

* See Dr. Rees's New Cyclopedia, article, Calvin.

protestant religion. Dissatisfied with his situation in the Church, he renounced the Catholick priesthood, and for a time devoted himself to the study of the civil law. But his deep researches into the sacred oracles, and a more intimate acquaintance with the reformers, strengthened his attachment to the religious opinions then rising into general notice.

After the death of his father, who had moved in an obscure condition, to acquire the means of support, Calvin published in Paris several elegant treatises on some of the Latin classicks. His attachment to the reformation becoming publick, he was obliged suddenly to quit this metropolis, and retire to an obscure village, where he supported himself by teaching Greek. At this early age he wrote a great part of his Institutes. Finding himself exposed to danger, even in his retirement, from the jealousy of the Papal Church, in 1534 he removed from the kingdom of France, and took up his residence at Basil, where, the next year, he published his Institutes in their present form. From Basil, Calvin removed to Geneva, and there eventually established himself. His labours in this place were unremitted. Protected by the civil authority, he became the head of a particular denomination of Christians, and established a Church distinct from the Lutheran and the Protestant Episcopalian communions. At Geneva he established a theological seminary, which, during a long period, was filled with students from different parts of Europe; and Calvin had the honour of giving his name to most of the religious establishments of Protestant Christendom. To this day, his system, I believe, is

predominant in Holland and among the dissenters in France. The language of the articles of the English episcopal Church is Calvinistick, though many of its clergy assert that the Church is not. In Scotland, Calvinism exists unadulterated and unimproved. Presbyterians through the United States are Calvinists. Many divines in New England, while they tenaciously hold the name, discover a disposition to modify the tenets of Calvin.

The mental powers of Calvin were of the first class. He was eminent for his literary acquisitions, ardent in his temper, and indefatigable in his exertions to promote the cause in which he was engaged. He claimed superiority over his fellow Christians ; was abusive to his opponents ; and, under circumstances of aggravated cruelty, he sacrificed Servetus at the stake. These were blemishes in his person as a man, and spots in his character as a Christian ; but our censures will be softened, when we consider the age in which he lived, and the opinions which then universally prevailed.

All controversies were at that period conducted with great personal abuse : these were generally carried on in Latin ; and abusive and scurrilous epithets in a dead language do not offend the ear, as similar ideas would, expressed in terms rendered familiar by their use in common conversation. Toleration was then no where admitted : even its meaning was scarce understood. It was a generally admitted principle, that the supreme power might lawfully punish hereticks. Catholick and protestant professors were stained with the blood of

persecution. The minds of reformed Christians were by slow degrees opened to admit the sacred truth, that human authority may not interfere in concerns between God and the souls of men.

We should violate the law of charity, to question the religious sincerity of Calvin ; but the weakness, which all allow, that he in some instances manifested, and the unchristian spirit that he certainly displayed in lighting the fires of persecution, furnish a sufficient reason for bringing his religious dogmas to the test of reason and scripture. The reformers rose from Egyptian darkness. Could it have been expected, that they would at once ascend to the light of the meridian day ? What was then the state of all other sciences ? If inquiry, investigation, and experiment, have since greatly exalted all natural sciences, can it be supposed that the general improvement of the human mind may not usefully be applied to theology ? All the circumstances which attended the rise and establishment of Christianity, are now more accurately known than they were at the period of the reformation. The bible, which at that time was a sealed book to the Christian community, has since, in all protestant countries, been opened to people of every class ; and among theologians, biblical criticism, within the last century, has been carried to a degree of perfection unexampled in any former age. Students in divinity at the present time, possess much greater advantages to acquire an accurate knowledge of revealed truth, than the first reformers did. Shall we close the avenues of light and information, and take the opinions of men, who lived in an age of

comparative ignorance and prejudice, as the infallible standard of orthodoxy? Or, shall we encourage the inquiry into the true meaning of scripture, and candidly examine the positions of those who enter upon the study with superiour means of light and knowledge? We all justly hold in high estimation the memories of the men, who broke asunder the chains which bound Christians to the debasing impositions of the Romish Hierarchy; but our veneration for their characters should not induce us to allow them an authority, which Christ has not delegated to any fallible individual, nor to any body of men. The reformers were not empowered to exercise dominion over the faith of their fellow Christians.

The system of divinity inculcated by Calvin is severe and gloomy in its aspect. To our apprehension, it deprives God of his character as the Father of the human family, and represents his moral administration as resting on mere sovereign power, and as making the individuals of the human race, without any apparent cause of distinction, either the objects of favouritism, or of inexorable wrath, and of interminable punishment.

The peculiarities of Calvinism are contained in five distinct propositions, usually denominated the five points. I cannot review the system more methodically, or more intelligibly than by considering these in their order. These five propositions follow.

1. "God has chosen a certain number in Christ, unto everlasting glory, before the foundation of the world, according to his immutable purpose, and of

his free grace and love, without the least foresight of faith and good works, or any conditions performed by the creature ; and that the rest of mankind he was pleased to pass by, and ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sins, to the praise of his vindictive justice.”

2. “Jesus Christ, by his death and sufferings, made an atonement for the sins of the elect only.”

3. “Mankind are totally depraved in consequence of the fall ; and by virtue of Adam’s being their publick head, the guilt of his sin was imputed, and a corrupt nature conveyed to all his posterity, from which proceed all actual transgressions : and that by sin we are made subject to death, and all miseries, temporal, spiritual, and eternal.”

4. “All whom God has predestinated unto life, he is pleased, in his appointed time, effectually to call by his word and spirit, out of the state of sin and death, in which they were by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.”

5. “Those whom God has effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, shall never finally fall from a state of grace.”

Can a discerning mind reflect upon this system of theology with any degree of approbation ? Consider it in its several parts, and attend to the inferences which necessarily flow from it, and then say, whether these be doctrines according to godliness.

Into all our inquiries respecting the moral administrations of Deity, we ought to carry some general and allowed principles. God is a being of absolute perfection. He is immutable in his nature, and no addition can be made to his essential glory

or happiness. A perfect being, a being infinitely powerful, wise and good, in creation must have had a regard to the happiness of the beings to whom he gave existence. In the government of a being possessed of these attributes, existence will not be given to any class of creatures, under circumstances which must necessarily render this existence miserable. The existence of every class of intelligent, moral beings, must be preferable to non-existence, unless by the abuse of their powers, they individually disqualify themselves for the happiness for which they were designed.

With these principles to regulate the inquiry, let us impartially examine the above positions of Calvin, which many pronounce to be the articles of a standing or falling Church.

Adam, the first man, was constituted the federal head of all his posterity. By the abuse of his moral liberty, a wilful transgression of the divine command, he forfeited the happiness of paradise, and became obnoxious to suffering and to death. The original sin of Adam is imputed to each individual of his descendants : they are all born sinners, possess a nature totally depraved : from this polluted source all actual transgressions proceed, and for their sins thus produced, they are made subject to all miseries, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. Before man had fallen from his state of innocence, before man existed, God of his own purpose, and without regard to their moral qualities, elected a small number of these depraved descendants of apostate Adam to unconditional salvation, but ordained the great multitude of the human family to

dishonour and wrath, to the praise of his vindictive justice—the vindictive justice, in other words, the revenge of Deity. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by his death atoned for the sins of the elect; and satisfaction having been made by him to divine justice, the elect, through the Saviour, are justified, and will be admitted to the society of heaven. The representation here is, the innocent is made to suffer for the sins of the offender, that the guilty may escape punishment.

The elect are brought out of a state of depravity and sin into a state of purity and holiness, by the special grace of God, that is, by the irresistible influences of the Divine Spirit; and being thus sanctified, they cannot fall from this pious and holy temper, nor fail of salvation; but the wretched descendants of Adam, who, without their own consent, were made sinners by him, and for whom Christ died not, are the victims of divine wrath, and on them eternal sufferings will be inflicted. They became sinners without their own agency, and they will be made eternally miserable because they did not act in direct opposition to a decree of the Almighty.

Are we not shocked by the mere thought of attributing this system of moral government to God? Is this scheme consistent with the mercy, the goodness, or the justice of Deity? Who appointed Adam to act in this extent for us? How can his sin be imputed to his posterity in such a manner as to render them guilty by his offence? If virtue and vice be not personal attributes, I know not what constitutes moral qualities. I can as

easily conceive of natural qualities being imputed, as moral ; as easily conceive of a tall, or a short, of a strong or weak man, by imputation, as of a righteous or sinful man, by imputation.

If Christ fully atoned for the sins of the elect ; if, by his sufferings, he made complete satisfaction to the violated law—is the mercy of God manifested by their acquittal ? When the surety pays a debt in full, the creditor exercises no clemency in discharging the principal. Does it comport with the justice of God, everlastingly to punish men, who receive a sinful nature as an inheritance, who on earth sin from necessity, and who are absolutely denied the means of acquiring moral or religious qualifications ? Can we, especially, reconcile to the justice of God, the infliction of aggravated punishment on sinners, for not accepting the salvation of the gospel, when, in the plan of grace, God passed them by, and ordained them to dishonour and misery ? Do not our minds recoil, I was about to have said, with horror from these principles of Calvinism ?

There is not a civil ruler, nor the head of a family in Christendom, who would not be offended, if the system of government were attributed to him in the affairs of a nation, or the transactions of a household, which Calvin attributes to God in the moral government of our world. Suppose a number of men confined in prison, not for hereditary depravity, but for wilful crime—the civil magistrate enters the cells of these convicts, and, without regarding the different shades of their guilt, announces a pardon to a few, and restores to them their

liberty ; and then, addressing the great majority, with moving eloquence describes the blessings of a well-ordered society, and the delights of domestick life ; and in language of sympathy and compassion, urges them to leave the abodes of darkness, filth, and misery, and return to the pursuits of civil life, and to the bosom of their endeared families, while their every limb is closely shackled, and they are fast bound by immoveable chains to the walls of their dungeon. Should we not say that this was a wanton mockery of impotence, and a cruel insult of the wretched victims of violated law ? Is this more than a faint representation of the moral state of sinners to whom the gospel is preached, under the Calvinistick article of reprobation ? Shall we dare to make God worse than man ?

In what estimation should we hold the man, who, being the father of numerous sons, should promise a rich reward to those who would execute an enjoined service, and threaten those who neglected its performance with the utmost severity of punishment—this father well knowing the required service to be far above the natural powers of his children : to some he furnishes the necessary assistance, and on them, they complying with the condition, he confers the promised reward ; but because his other sons did not execute an impossible command, and which he had pre-determined they never should execute, the father falls on them, and beats them, without compassion or mēcy ? Is our heavenly Father less kind, just, and good, than an earthly parent ?

SERMON XV.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

ROMANS xi. 7.

The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

ON a former occasion, I proposed reviewing the Calvinistick system of theology, and made some general observations on the character and writings of Calvin. His body of divinity essentially consists of five distinct propositions, usually denominated the five points. The first of these is the subject of this discourse, viz.

1. "God has chosen a certain number in Christ, unto everlasting glory, before the foundation of the world, according to his immutable purpose, and of his free grace and love, without the least foresight of faith and good works, or any conditions performed by the creature ; and that the rest of mankind he was pleased to pass by, and ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sins, to the praise of his vindictive justice."

I shall make the attempt to prove, that neither reason nor revelation supports the doctrine of election, in the meaning of the above proposition.

The foreknowledge of God is adduced as proof of unconditional election. Foreknowledge, it is said, implies necessity : if an event be contingent, if man have the liberty and the power to act, or not to act ; to act in this manner, or in a different—then omniscience itself cannot foreknow that event, or determine how, in the given instance, this man will conduct : the issue is uncertain, and even God cannot foresee it. God then must have decreed the events foreknown : he must have pre-determined the actions of men, and appointed the means to produce them, and consequently have elected some to virtue and happiness, and reprobated others to vice and misery.

To reconcile the prescience of the Creator with the free agency of the creature, has been the great difficulty among ancient and modern metaphysicians. The problem is probably too deep to be clearly solved by the human mind. With this abstruse question I shall not perplex you. For our present purpose, I think it enough to reply, that we are unable to comprehend the manner in which the attributes of an infinite being are exercised. The manner in which omniscience exerts itself, if I may use this expression, is as incomprehensible as the manner in which almighty power is displayed. As in one case, we do not imagine that God is under the necessity of using a combination of powers to perform his mighty works, as men are to accomplish a great design ; so in the other, we ought not to sup-

pose that God is indebted to any medium of knowledge : infinite knowledge is the attribute of the divine nature. The foreknowledge of God does not render the actions of men necessary, nor is it the efficient cause of human agency : these do not take place because they are foreknown by God ; but these are foreknown, because they will actually take place. Our knowledge of facts which exist around us, is not the cause of their existence ; but they really exist, and therefore they are known. Every thing past, present, and to come, is in the mind of God, as fully as any passing event is in our minds. A single example from scripture may make my meaning more clear, and perhaps serve as a practical illustration of the principle. When David was in the walled town of Keilah, and Saul approached the place with an army, he inquired of the Lord, whether the men of Keilah would deliver him into the hands of Saul : the answer was, they will ; and therefore he made his escape. Here an event is predicted which was suspended on a previous contingency : the contingency did not take place, and the event was not produced. Foreknowledge, in this instance, did not imply necessity.

In a word, we are satisfied from ourselves, that we are free agents ; but we cannot fathom the knowledge of God. Our ignorance of the manner in which the divine attributes are exercised, is a good reason for rejecting an argument which is brought in affirmation of a doctrine that is opposed to our most approved apprehensions of the character of God ; and is apparently a violation of the clearest principle of his moral government.

Another argument in support of the doctrine of irrelative election is drawn from the established government of Deity. Reason and revelation, it is said, unitedly teach us that God, who made, governs the world. All events are under divine direction. Human agency is intimately connected with, and has a constant influence over common events; and therefore human agency must be under the absolute direction of Deity. To suppose that men can act without the direct impulse of Deity, is to suppose that God has put the government of the world out of his own hands—to suppose that men are independent beings, and may counteract the designs of the Supreme Ruler of the world. The scriptures expressly assert the universal agency of God; and the doctrine of irrelative decrees, it must be acknowledged, is necessarily involved in the general plan of the divine government.

To this argument I reply.—God indeed governs the world in wisdom and righteousness; and all events are under his inspection and control.—But he has adapted his laws to the constitution of the bodies which are to be governed by them. The material kingdom is directed by principles which have an invariable and necessary influence: animated nature is governed by the law of instinct; and a moral government is established over the human family. Man possesses intellectual and moral powers, and scope is given for their exercise. Within these limits man is a free, and therefore an accountable being. His moral character depends on the manner in which he cultivates his powers, and improves the means with which he

is favoured, for intellectual and moral attainments ; and God has only decreed, that his reward shall be according to his works. Yet God has not put the government of the world out of his hands. By a depth of wisdom, which we cannot fathom, he brings good out of evil, and makes wicked men the unconscious and the unintentional instruments to subserve the high and benevolent purposes of his government.

I shall now proceed to the consideration of those passages of scripture which are the most frequently brought in proof of unconditional election. I premise one or two general remarks, which I wish you would bear in mind, in our review of these texts from the sacred oracles.

We must make a distinction between the character of God, as the creator of all beings, and as the judge of intelligent and free agents. In creation, God is directed by his own wisdom and benevolence. Whether he make ten or ten thousand worlds, none may say unto him, What doest thou ? Whether he form archangels or worms of the dust—whether he create one class of creatures only, or myriads—none may stay his hand that it shall not work. If the existence of a created being be a blessing, he has no right to say to his Creator, Why has thou made me thus ? But having invested his creatures with certain powers, and given them particular laws, as the rule of their action, when God calls them to account, he will judge each class, by the law designed to regulate his conduct. It would be unjust to judge the lowest class of moral subjects by the law given as the rule of life to the highest.

With these general principles in our recollection, let us open the sacred volume. Paul in the epistle to the Romans is most frequently quoted, as decisive authority for the doctrine of election. I shall therefore attend more particularly to his reasoning. The language of our text is—"The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." He declares, in the name of God, concerning Jacob and Esau—"Before they had done good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Paul affirms, "God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." I shall review these and other passages in the epistle to the Romans in their connexion, and then we may determine whether they really prove the position in the support of which they are adduced.

The first part of the epistle to the Romans contains particular directions to those who had been recently converted to Christianity. In the ninth chapter, St. Paul brings into view the nation of the Jews, and laments the infidelity of that people, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant, and the giving the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the Fathers, and of whom, concerning the flesh, Christ came. The Jewish nation was selected in divine wisdom, to be the peculiar people of God, to whom he made a revelation of his gracious purposes towards the children of men. Their distinguished privileges led the Jews to suppose, that they were exclusively the chosen people of heaven; and that in consequence of their being the children of Abra-

ham, they were entitled not only to the advantages of divine revelation, but to the special favour of God; whether they improved or abused their privileges, they thought themselves better than other nations. When the primitive converts to Christianity, from the Jewish Church, were convinced that it was the divine will that the gospel should be preached to the whole family of man, in astonishment they exclaimed—"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Paul in this epistle corrects the gross error which inflated the Israelites with spiritual pride. He informs the Jews, that they were not chosen to be a peculiar people on account of their inherent good qualities; and tells them, that they are not entitled to the special favour of Heaven, in consequence of their election; that unless they wisely improve their privileges, they will incur divine displeasure.—The election on which Paul dwells, has no respect to the moral character or future state of individuals. The doctrine stated is this—God, in his good pleasure, chose the descendants of Abraham, in a particular line, to be the people to whom he would reveal his will, and grant peculiar religious privileges. To be convinced that the election spoken of by Paul is an election of a people to peculiar external privileges, and not of individuals to the happiness of heaven, you have only to follow him in his reasoning. The apostle begins with Abraham, at the time he was separated to be the common father of a distinguished nation. "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children; but in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

You are not entitled to these benefits merely because you are descended from Abraham : it was the good pleasure of God to limit the privilege to Isaac. “ At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.” He descends to Jacob and Esau.—“ The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her (Rebecca) that the elder shall serve the younger ; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” The general strain of the apostle’s argument shows, that the election here spoken of, respects a people, not an individual ; and it is evident from the annexed prophecy, the elder shall serve the younger. This was verified in their descendants : the children of Israel subjected the Edomites ; but Esau never served Jacob—he was a terror to him the greater part of his life. St. Paul proceeds.—“ What shall we say then ? Is there unrighteousness with God ? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy ; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” Is it unrighteous with God to bestow external privileges in this manner—to distinguish one people from all others, by granting them particular advantages—to select an individual man, and grant him privileges which are withholden from his fellow beings ? Let no one entertain this impious thought. God giveth to all richly ; and who shall direct him in the bestowment of unmerited blessings ? Did not God declare to Moses, when he distinguished him from all

mankind by divine communications, that he conferred these peculiar blessings according to his own will, and had compassion and mercy on whom he would ? The apostle adds—"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will ? Nay, but O man, who art thou, that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed, say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour ?" If God, the Creator and governour of the universe, according to his own will, give existence to various orders of beings ; if he bestow external advantages to this people, and that man, as he pleases ; and if the actions of men are made ultimately, by an overruling Providence, subservient to the designs of his government, why doth God ever find fault ? Consider, O man, what thou sayest ! Shall not God be permitted to display his attributes in the creation of various classes of beings, as to him seemeth best ? Is it not fit, that he should make individuals of the same class to differ from others in their natural powers ? May he not grant higher means of improvement to one than to another ? Dost thou find fault with thy Maker, because thou wast not formed an angel ? Because the wise and benign Governour of the world overrules thy wickedness, and makes thy sinful agency ultimately conducive to the purposes of his wise government, wilt thou make this an excuse for evil doing ? Does not the potter form the clay into any shape he pleases, and

shall the Parent of Being be limited in the exercise of his creative power? On the supposition that our apostle is speaking of God, as the creator of all beings, and the author of all privileges, the allusion to the potter is pertinent and forcible; but admit the capacity of moral beings, and suppose Paul to be speaking of God as their judge, and assigning their condition in a future world, and the simile loses its pertinence and force. What analogy is there between a potter forming clay into vessels of various sizes and shapes, clay that has neither consciousness nor sensation, and God, adjusting, at the close of a probationary life, the future condition of the rational and accountable subjects of his present moral government?

In the tenth chapter of Romans, St. Paul illustrates the principle he had advanced in the ninth, respecting the sovereign pleasure of God, by mentioning the manner, in which the Gentiles were placed in the possession of the blessings of the Christian revelation; and he alludes to the fulfilment of the prophesy of Isaiah.—“I was found of them that sought me not: I was made manifest to them that asked not after me.”

I have not time to comment particularly on every part of the apostle's reasoning on the subject before us. I therefore pass to an allegory contained in the eleventh chapter. By the metaphor of an olive-tree St. Paul illustrates the moral state of the Jew and the Gentile. By the olive-tree, doubtless the apostle means the revealed dispensation of divine grace and mercy. The Jews he considers as

the natural branches of this tree, but cut off, and the Gentiles grafted into it. By being the natural branches of this tree, or by being ingrafted into it, we must understand either an election to the immortal rewards promised through Christ to the children of God, or an admission on earth to the enjoyment of the privileges of this divine dispensation. That personal election, in the sense of our proposition, cannot be intended, is evident, because the apostle declares that the Jews were cut off for their unbelief; and on their believing they may again be joined; and the Gentiles are told that they shall also be cut off, unless they continue in the faith. In the condition of persons elected to eternal life, no such change can take place. The decrees of God are immutable. That Paul, throughout these chapters, means election to external privileges, is further evident, from the allusion to the prophet Elias or Elijah. In his time, a period of general apostacy, there were seven thousand Israelites who did not bow the knee to Baal. In like manner, St. Paul observes, that in his day, a remnant of Israel was found, who adhered to the dispensation of heaven, according to the election of grace. Election to what? Clearly to the enjoyment of the privileges of revelation.

We find, then, that the apostle, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of his epistle to the Romans, treats of national, not personal election; of election to the enjoyment of the external privileges of revelation, and not of unconditional election to eternal life.

You, my candid hearers, may have taken notice that I passed without comment those passages of the chapters reviewed, which speak of God as hardening the heart of Pharaoh, of blinding those whom he will, &c. On these I have but few remarks to offer. In all instances, when we have discovered the general purpose of a writer, we should be careful not to put a meaning opposed to this, on allusions and examples incidentally introduced. It should be observed that the compassion and mercy, mentioned by St. Paul in the above places, are limited to the bestowment of external privileges, and are not extended to the acceptance of individuals at the tribunal of Heaven ; the reprobation, the blindness and obduracy, opposed to this compassion and mercy, should be limited to an exclusion from, or an insensibility to these external privileges, and not extended to the condemnation of the day of judgment.

I generally observe, in the bold and figurative style of the Jews, God is said to do what is brought about in the ordinary course of events. Moses, where he distinguishes between murder and justifiable homicide, uses the following language.—“He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand, then will I appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.” Here an event is imputed to the agency of God, which we should call accidental. In the same phraseology, God is said to blind the minds, and harden the hearts of those, whom he permits to abuse his blessings, and by their wilful and habitual sins,

to blind their own minds, and harden their own hearts.

That human blindness and obstinacy proceed not from the direct agency of God, we know ; for revelation assures us, that “ God is not tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man.” It is certain that God does not influence the human mind to sin ; for the sinner, in the scriptures, is denominated a rebel against God, and is said to incur the divine displeasure, and to make himself a vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction.

A passage from Acts (xiii. 48.) is often produced as an authority for the doctrine of election.—“ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord ; and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.” The Greek word, translated in this place, *ordained*, does not mean predestinated or fore-ordained, but set in order, disposed. As many as were disposed, believed. As many as maintained a right temper, and were influenced by moral considerations, believed, and made eternal life the object of desire and pursuit.

The term election is used in different senses by the writers of the New Testament. But if predestination, in the Calvinistick meaning, be not found in the chapters we have reviewed, few, I believe, will assert that satisfactory proof of its truth can be produced from other parts of the sacred writings.

Our minds, then, are prepared to give undivided attention to the plain, the general language of the inspired penmen on the subject of our salvation. They unitedly inform us, that God has committed

talents to our management—enacted laws as the rule of our actions—established by his son Jesus Christ, conditions of our acceptance ; and appointed a day on which we must account for the course of our lives, and hear an impartial sentence pronounced on the manner we shall have improved the powers entrusted to our cultivation. The sacred writers also assure us, that God delights not in the death of the sinner, but would that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved.

Let us, my respected hearers, work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that God worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure.

SERMON XVI.

THE BENEFITS RESULTING FROM THE MÉDIATION OF
JESUS CHRIST, ARE APPLICABLE TO ALL MEN.

ROMANS v. 10, 11.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life : And not only so, we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

IN a proposed review of the Calvinistick system of divinity, the first of the five propositions, usually denominated “the five points,” was our last subject. Your attention is now solicited to the consideration of the second, viz.

2. “Jesus Christ, by his death and sufferings, made an atonement for the sins of the elect only.”

This article is founded on the Calvinistick views of atonement, by the sufferings and death of Christ. It is therefore expedient to enter into the meaning of the sacred writers, when they speak of the effi-

cacy of the mediatorial agency of our Saviour. This inquiry I will pursue in the following manner.

1. To examine the representations made in the bible, of the goodness and mercy of God.

2. Consider the meaning of those passages in the New Testament, which mention the efficacy of the sufferings and death of Christ. And,

3. I shall endeavour to show, from the authority of scripture, that the benefits of Christ's mediation are not limited to a few elect individuals, but are extended to the whole family of man.

1. To examine the representations made in the bible, of the goodness and mercy of God.

No position in divinity, to my apprehension, is more opposed to the general language of the New Testament—none which reflects greater dishonour on the character and moral government of Deity—none which is more apt to mislead men in the highest concerns of religion, than the doctrine, that God requires complete satisfaction to be made to his justice for sin, by the vicarious sufferings of our Saviour, to propitiate his regard to the repenting offender.

This doctrine represents our God as inexorable in his disposition : it deprives him of those moral attributes, which are the proper foundation of our love and gratitude : it destroys all goodness and mercy in the pardon of the repenting sinner ; and supposes that God has introduced a principle in his administrations, which would disgrace any government on earth.

It is inconsistent, we are told, with divine justice, for God to pardon the sinner, unless full satisfaction be made to his violated law. Is it consistent with the attributes of a perfect being to accept the punishment of an innocent being, who offers himself as a substitute for the sinner, and on this account to pardon the real offender? What should we think of that human government, which, refusing to extend a pardon to the humbled violator of its laws, should consent that an individual, whose whole life had been faultless, might take the place of the offender, and perish on the scaffold, and on account of his death, grant life and liberty to the man, who, by his crimes, had brought on himself the sentence of condemnation? If God require full satisfaction for every offence, shall we, in imitation of him, demand that the merited punishment be inflicted on the real offender, or on his substitute, before we forgive one, who having offended, in sorrow supplicates our clemency? On the apprehension, that the presiding Divinity is, in disposition, unrelenting and vindictive, have been founded most of the weak and cruel rites of superstition. Hence human beings were, among ancient Pagans, immolated on the altars of Moloch. Hence the monkish severities and the bodily mortifications of the papal establishment. Hence the tortures, which the votarists of modern paganism, through the eastern world, voluntarily inflict upon themselves. I may add, the apprehension that the design of religious service is not to form men to a disposition which will render them worthy to

be the recipients of divine favour, but to induce God to be propitious, causes multitudes, at the present day, to undertake useless labours in religion, in every part of Christendom.

The representations of the bible, respecting the character of God, are widely different. It confirms the information proclaimed by the works of nature, and the common dispensations of Providence, that God is as benevolent as he is powerful; as compassionate and merciful as he is just and wise. It assures us that God is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all the works of his hands; that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but would that he should repent and live. Such is the language of the Old Testament. In the New, the same joyous and animating truth is more fully established. Our Saviour no where declares, that by his death, he should make satisfaction to God for the sins of the world—no where informs us, that by his sufferings, as the substitute of sinners, he should induce God to the exercise of mercy towards the actual transgressor; on the contrary, the goodness and mercy of Deity is the theme on which he delights to dwell. He every where styles God, our Father; he appeals to the most endearing relations of the human family, and to the most tender affections of the human heart, as allusions the best adapted to illustrate the inherent, the unchangeable benevolence of his God and of our God; and, at the same time, he tells us, that the compassion and providence of the father towards the son of his love, that the tenderness and solicitude of the mother towards the infant of her breast, are not

sufficient emblems of the goodness and clemency of our Heavenly Parent. Attend to the parable of the prodigal son, which doubtless we are to consider as an illustration of the Christian system. Is the semblance of the Calvinistick notion of satisfaction to be found in this beautiful parable. Nothing like it. The father is delighted that this lost son is disposed to return to filial duty ; the folly of the prodigal is forgotten in the fulness of joy that the wanderer is reclaimed ; the father meets the son retracing his devious steps ; embraces him in the arms of affection ; clothes him with the best robe, and causes his re-instatement in the peaceable and happy relation of domestick life to be celebrated by feasting and merriment, through every department of his household.

If the apostles of our Lord were divinely taught that the great design of his death was to make satisfaction to the justice of Deity, it must be supposed, that they would have clearly explained this essential Christian truth in their first discourses to the Jews and to the Gentiles. What is the fact ? Peter, on the day of the descent of the Holy Ghost, and again, when he cured the impotent man, paints in glowing colours, the sin of his countrymen, in crucifying the Lord of Life ; but he says not one word about Christ's dying to make satisfaction to divine justice for their sins. The sum of his address is, that by repentance and faith in Jesus, as the Messiah of God, they might obtain the forgiveness of God. To Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, Peter says nothing respecting Christ being a substitute for sinners, and suffering, to appease

the wrath of offended Deity. But when the Holy Ghost was poured out on this pious centurion, and on those whom he had assembled, the apostle, in surprise exclaims—"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but that in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Paul, in his first preaching to the Gentiles, is as silent, respecting the doctrine of satisfaction, as Peter. He makes faith in Jesus, and repentance from sin, the condition of divine mercy by Christ; but he does not inform them, that the death of the Saviour was the cause of mercy in God. Much less does he make this an essential article of Christian belief. The amount of his doctrine on this subject, may be found in his preaching to the Athenians. Having stated the supremacy and benevolence of the one true God, and mentioned their blindness and their corruptions, as Gentiles, he adds—"The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Were these sentiments of St. Paul found in a sermon of a minister suspected of heresy, many would say that they did not contain the true scheme of salvation by Jesus Christ; but that it was legal preaching, dangerous to the souls of men.

What then is the real doctrine of revelation respecting the merits of Christ's death? The answer,

I shall endeavour to give under the next head of our discourse, viz.—

2. To consider the meaning of those passages of the New Testament, which mention the efficacy of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

The mediation of Jesus Christ is not the efficient cause of the goodness and mercy which God has manifested towards the sinful children of men ; but the mediation of Jesus Christ, with all its benefits and blessings, resulted from the inherent goodness and mercy of Deity.—“ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The language of the New Testament is not, that God was reconciling himself to the world by Christ, but reconciling the world to himself. The disposition of sinners must be changed—not the disposition of God. He is good and merciful, and unchangeable in his nature, purpose, and agency. It pleased God to make his Son, Jesus Christ, the medium of his mercy to the children of men. Why this plan of salvation was adopted in preference to any other, we know not ; nor what connexion the mediation of Christ has with the general moral administrations of Heaven ; nor to the performance of our duty, is it necessary that we should know. We ought gratefully to receive divine blessings, and not enter into dispute with our Maker respecting the manner in which they shall be bestowed. We are assured that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. But it was God, who originated the wise and merciful plan of our salvation.

He constituted Jesus to be the Mediator of its high blessings : he appointed the measures by which it should be carried to its consummation. By the efficacy of means thus appointed, the evils of the apostacy are removed, the wall of distinction between Jew and Gentile is broken down, and all the members of the human family are united in one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one hope of their calling.

But the evangelists and the apostles speak of the benefits which result to mankind from the ministry and death of Christ under different figures of speech. Let us examine several of these, which are the most commonly introduced into religious controversy and conversation.

Christ is called our ransom, or is said to have been made a ransom for us. Thus we read in Matthew—"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." In his epistle to Timothy, Paul writes, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." In the language of the world, a ransom is understood as a price paid for the redemption of a person who was holden in some kind of servitude or bondage. Thus a ransom was paid to redeem a prisoner detained in captivity. The consideration is here paid to the power which consents to the liberation of the captive. Likewise the master who holds a slave may receive a ransom for his manumission.* But the word ransom is often us-

* See Rev. Professor Ware's Sermon at the Ordination of Rev. Mr Pierpont.

ed to express the act of delivering the captive or the slave from bondage, and not the price paid for their delivery. This, I apprehend, is always the meaning of the term when used by the sacred writers in the concerns of our salvation. Sinners are in the bible denominated the captives and the slaves of Satan. From this servitude and bondage Jesus Christ has, by his mediation and ministry, ransomed them; but the supposition never entered the human mind, that Christ paid a consideration to Satan for the delivery of sinners from his empire. No. Our Saviour has ransomed the children of men from the dominion of the wicked one, that he might establish a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Christ gave his life for sinners, that he might ransom them from the bondage of iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Christ died that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage. This is the ransom which he has obtained for sinners.

Jesus Christ is also said, by his death, to have reconciled sinners to God. He is called our reconciliation.—“You that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works, now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unproveable, in his sight.” Again.—“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

them." You, my Christian brethren, must perceive that the reconciliation here described respects sinners themselves, and not God. The supposition that the death of Christ was to pacify the wrath of offended Deity, and to render him compassionate and merciful towards his rational offspring on earth, seems to be opposed to the plain import of these very passages, as well as to the whole language of scripture on this doctrine. It is here expressly declared, as above stated, that the scheme of our salvation flowed from the inherent benevolence of the divine nature. God is ever disposed to confer his favour on his children in a manner which consists with his underived his immutable perfections. He has made his Son Jesus Christ the mediator and minister of the highest blessings to man. In our text, the apostle reasons thus—"If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life; and not only so, we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." This is the only passage in the New Testament in which the word atonement occurs, and here the term ought to be reconciliation; for the word in the original is the substantive from the verb, which, in the former verse, is translated reconciled, and the Greek word in every other place is thus translated. The meaning of our text, in the paraphrase of Dr. M'Knight, is this—"If, being enemies under sentence of death, we are respited, and made to lay down our enmity to God, through the death of his Son; much more, being thus reconciled, we shall be saved from pun-

ishment through his life in the body, which he regained, that he might govern us now and acquit us at last. And not only do we hope to be saved from wrath by Christ's life, but we, believers, the spiritual seed, even boast in God as our God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received an opportunity of being pardoned." This text, then, furnishes no authority for the doctrine of satisfaction: it states the means appointed by divine wisdom and mercy to bring us into the state of salvation, and measures adopted to prepare us for the society of heaven:

But as the word atonement is often used on subjects of divinity; it may be well to learn its meaning as applied to the Jewish ritual. It frequently occurs in the Old Testament, and in every place it means the efficacy which God was pleased to give to particular ceremonial observances in removing legal impurities and uncleanness from men, and in making the sanctuary, the altar, the vessels, &c. legally pure and holy. Atonement was made as well for the altar, the vessels, &c. as for sinners. If we choose to apply this term to Christianity, it must mean the efficacy of the measures which God, by Jesus Christ, has been pleased to appoint to purge the consciences of men from dead works, that they may through Jesus Christ be justified in his sight. Atonement, in a scriptural sense, cannot mean merit transferred from Christ to the sinner, by which he is justified; but an effect produced in the disposition of the sinner himself, which renders him the fit object of the mercy of God. Christ is said "to

be the propitiation for our sins.” He was the medium of the gracious provision which assures pardon to the repenting sinner, and eternal life to the obedient Christian. He is said “to have given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.” In the execution of the gracious and merciful purpose of God in the salvation of sinners, he consecrated his days, and sacrificed his life.—“He was the good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep.” In imitation of his piety and devotedness to the appointed duties of his mediatorial office, we are directed, as his disciples, to present ourselves a living sacrifice unto God, holy, and acceptable in his sight. Christ, we are told, “bore the sins and bore the sicknesses of men.” He did not take the sins and the diseases of men upon himself, but delivered men from them.

I proceed to the last head of our discourse, viz.—

3. To show, from the authority of scripture, that the benefits of the mediation of Jesus Christ are not limited to a few elect individuals, but are extended to the whole family of man.

I need not dwell on this branch of our subject. If the statements made in the previous propositions be admitted, no pretext can be found for the limitation of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. God is, in the bible, represented as the common parent of all the members of the human family. All his children possess an intellectual and moral capacity; and it is expressly declared that they are all placed in a state of probation, candidates for a blessed immortality. The laws of the gospel are applied to all men without distinction : its sanctions and its prom-

ises are as general. Christ, the scriptures assert, tasted death for every man; and they assure us that God would not that any should perish, but that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. In the description of the day of judgment the declaration is express, that all shall be raised from the tomb, summoned before the tribunal of the constituted Judge; and that each individual shall receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they shall have done good or evil.

The covenant of grace and mercy was established at the time when sentence of death was pronounced upon apostate man. By this covenant, all men are brought into a state of salvation. But the conditions of acceptance with God are suited to the capacities which individuals of mankind possess, and to the means of improvement that they enjoy. They who are favoured with the privileges of the Christian revelation will, in the great day of account, be judged by the laws of the gospel; they who are left to the guidance of reason and conscience, will be judged by the law of reason, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. At his tribunal every mouth shall be stopped. The pious and good of all nations and ages will be admitted to the honour and glory of an immortal life in heaven.

SERMON XVII.

ON TOTAL DEPRAVITY.

PSALM li. 5.

Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

IN the order of our review, the third point in the Calvinistick system of theology, is the subject of our morning attention. This scholastick article follows.

5. "Mankind are totally depraved in consequence of the fall of Adam; and by virtue of Adam's being their federal head, the guilt of his sin was imputed, and a corrupt nature conveyed to all his posterity, from which proceed all actual transgressions; and that by sin, we are subject to death, and all miseries temporal, spiritual, and eternal."

The doctrine of imputation has already been considered. Most of those among us, who choose to be ranked with Calvinists, deny imputation; but they still hold to total depravity. Let this be our present subject. It will be my endeavour to make it evident that men are not totally depraved—

1. By showing that the passages from scripture, which are usually quoted as authority in support of the doctrine of total depravity, do not prove it.

2. By analyzing the human constitution, and reviewing those actions of men which naturally flow from constitutional principles. I am,

1. To show that the passages from scripture, which are usually quoted as authority, in support of the doctrine of total depravity, do not prove it. I shall first introduce a text from Genesis.—“ And the Lord smelled a sweet savour ; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake ; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth ; neither will I again smite any more every thing living as I have done.” Criticks in the Hebrew language inform us, that the word *for*, in this verse, should be rendered, though ; at least, that the Hebrew word will bear thus to be translated, and often has the meaning of though. Let us review the passage with this correction. The antediluvian world had rendered themselves too corrupt and vile to be reformed by motives suited to the minds of free moral agents. God therefore removed them from the stage of moral action, that the earth might be re-peopled with a better race from the family of pious Noah. Accepting the sacrifice of this patriarch for his own preservation, when the world of his fellow-beings were destroyed, God was graciously pleased to promise, that he would not again thus destroy a whole generation, though the imagination of their hearts should be evil from their youth. This passage, I apprehend, is not

descriptive of the natural tendency of the human mind, nor of the moral complexion of its powers and affections ; but it alludes to a period of almost universal corruption. Men had abandoned themselves to impiety, violence, and licentiousness. It therefore furnishes no proof of universal and total depravity.

A text from Jeremiah is often produced as an authority in aid of the doctrine of total depravity, and as proof that the natural man is, by fatal necessity, self-deceived.—“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked : who can know it ?” When we attentively look into the chapter from which this passage is taken, we find that Jeremiah is showing the folly of placing our chief trust and confidence in man. To dissuade from it, he remarks, that the heart of man may be deceitful, and when his inclination is pure, his strength is weakness ; he therefore directs those, whom he addresses, to place their confidence in God.—“Thus saith the Lord, cursed be the man, who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord : blessed is the man, that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” In this connexion, the text quoted follows.—“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked : who can know it ? I the Lord search the hearts and try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways.” No proof is here found of any inherent malignity dwelling in the moral constitution of man ; but a denunciation is pronounced against the individual, who, forgetting his God, places his chief dependence on

a man weak and frail like himself. The hearts of our fellow-beings, the prophet assures us, we cannot fully know : their warmest declarations of friendship may be deceitful : their acts of benevolence may be designed to gain our confidence, the more deeply to wound us ; and with the best dispositions, their strength is but weakness. Trust then in God, who is wise and benevolent, and powerful ; who penetrates the secrets of the heart, and will reward every man according to his works. This text degrades not human nature ; but leaves to self-approbation its full confidence, and to conscious rectitude its enlivening hopes.

Our text is by many considered as conclusive proof of total depravity. I shall therefore more fully illustrate it.—“Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Let us attend to the occasion on which these expressions were uttered. David had been guilty of offences the most atrocious. The prophet Nathan had presented his picture in full view, and drawn it in the brightest colours. In a pathetick manner he had represented the circumstances which aggravated the king’s guilt, and in the name of God, had denounced judgment against him. David was terrified by this denunciation of divine wrath. The lively representation of his case by the prophet, awakened his drowsy conscience, and in consternation he contemplated his sins in all their magnitude of guilt and danger ; and in the glowing figures of eastern language, he expressed his penitence, and implored forgiveness. In this state of mind, he composed the psalm of which our text is a part.—

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me.—Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” The subsequent context breathes the same strain.—“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.” The whole psalm breathes the spirit of contrition and penitence.

David was humbled under a deep conviction, that he had dishonoured the religion which he was bound to support, and thereby had offended his Maker. He was disposed to take the guilt and the responsibility on himself. While he thus acknowledges his own criminality, he appears to be fully sensible of the justice of God in his condemnation: he debases himself, and in the strong language of passion, confesses his guilt, and with fervour supplicates divine compassion and forgiveness.

To apply the language of David on this occasion to mankind, and consider it as descriptive of the moral complexion of human nature, is just as absurd, as it would be to apply the penitent expres-

sions of an individual drunkard, thief, or murderer, to the same purpose, and to make the humble confessions of these offenders descriptive of the moral complexion of the human mind in all men. To apply the language of David on this occasion to all men, and to suppose it descriptive of human nature generally; is to defeat the very design for which he adopted it. Had it been true that he brought into the world a mind necessarily prone to evil, and only evil, this circumstance, so far from adding guilt to his actual transgressions, would, in the court of reason and conscience, lessen their criminality. When he was describing the aggravation of the offence, would he do it by mentioning the circumstance which excused the action or greatly mitigated its criminality? This cannot be admitted; for it follows, that by thus stating the total depravity of his nature, he justifies his offence by the very language by which he meant the most forcibly to express its guilt.

If we take the strong expressions and bold figures of the sacred writers respecting particular sinners, and from them attempt to establish general positions respecting the depravity of human nature; by the same rule we may take their representations concerning the actions of good men, and from them prove that man, in his natural state, is prone to good, to good only, and to good continually. For instance, select the declaration of Job, who declares that he had done good from his birth. If the different phrases of David and Job be literally applied to the nature of man, it follows that the virtues of the

one were as much constitutional as the sins of the other ; and therefore from scripture we may prove that all men are naturally prone to evil, and are prone to virtue ; and that, from constitutional influence, their actions are all absolutely sinful, and are all strictly virtuous. But if the sacred writers apply these respective modes of expression only to individual characters, then from them we cannot establish a general rule, by which to determine the moral tendency of human nature. Figures of speech should always be construed in such a manner as to render them consistent with the plain language of the sacred writers.

We will now proceed to the New Testament. St. Paul declares that “the natural man receiveth not the things of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” By the natural man, in this passage, we are not to understand the creature man, in all his intellectual and moral powers, as God has formed him, the subject of a moral government ; nor will the Greek admit of this construction. By the natural, the apostle here means the sensual, the animal man ; the man who minds only things of earth and sense, and exclusively seeks worldly gratifications. We all can judge of the inveteracy of habits thus formed ; they cloud the understanding, corrupt the affections, and fatally bias the judgment. The man, whose animal passions are the law of his conduct, and who is buried in sensual indulgences, has no relish for the truths pertaining to eternal life : if he thinks of them at all, he views them as trifles unworthy of serious regard ; and, lest they

should disturb his favourite pursuits, he discards them from his reflections. His eyes are shut to the light of revelation : his ears are closed to the voice of wisdom ; and while he thus cherishes his corrupt affections, he cannot understand the truths pertaining to God and to immortality : they are by him considered as foolishness. The worth and importance of these are clearly perceived only by him who maintains the superiority of reason over passion, who cherishes a teachable temper, is disposed to receive truth in the love of it, and to do the will of God as far as he knows it. No individual brings this blind and obdurate mind into the world : too many acquire it by a habit of sensuality and sin.

Similar comments will explain the meaning of the affirmation of St. Paul—"To be carnally minded is death ; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

The remarks of St. Paul respecting himself are adduced as proof of the total depravity of man—"I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man ; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members."—Man is a being compounded of rational and moral powers, and of animal passions and appetites. Human passions are not in themselves sinful, but they are often the occasion of sin. The struggle between the intellectual and animal parts of the human constitution has been felt and

acknowledged by all men. The Roman philosopher expressed the common sentiment of mankind, when he exclaimed, "I see and approve virtue, I follow vice." This, in a greater or less degree, is true of all men. Every individual will readily acknowledge, that he in too many instances allows his appetites and passions an improper indulgence. No man liveth and sinneth not. Paul, in the epistle from which the above passages are taken, reasons thus :—The law requires perfect obedience : men are sinners : death is the appointed wages of sin ; all men, therefore, are by this law condemned, and are under sentence of death. He takes himself as an example of the whole race of man, and thus enforces his argument. The moral law of God is righteous and good : my reason and my conscience fully approve it, and its contemplation gives me delight ; but in the propensities of the animal part of my system I find a principle of action opposed to the law of Heaven, and under its influence, even when I would do good, evil is present with me : being thus conscious of offence, I know that I cannot be justified in strict justice. I certainly am exposed to the penalty of violated law : I am exposed to that death with which Adam was threatened for disobedience. He exclaims, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death ? In our translation it follows, I thank God, &c. which in this place seems not to have a consistent meaning. Several approved versions read, "the grace or favour of God : " admit this reading and we have a plain question, and a direct answer,—Who shall deliver me from this death ? The favour or grace of God,

through Jesus Christ our Lord ; and Paul proceeds to draw the pleasing inference—"There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." This apostle informs us, "that as sin abounded, grace does much more abound ; that as in Adam we all die, so in Christ Jesus we are all made alive." Is there in all this statement any proof of positive malignity being infused into the moral disposition of man by the fall of Adam, which must be extracted by extraneous power, before he can possess a mind for religious action ? I think not. The texts quoted are a powerful appeal to the moral sense, to the love of life and of happiness in men, to induce them, under a consciousness of sin, which deprives them of every claim to the reward of merit, to accept with gratitude the proffers of mercy by Jesus Christ. The evangelists and the apostles unitedly inform us, that the conditions of acceptance through Christ, are suited to the present capacity of man ; and the immense apparatus of means furnished by the gospel, rest on the admitted fact, that he now possesses the moral as well as the intellectual power to use them, and by their aid to acquire the qualifications necessary for heaven.

Other passages of the bible are considered by many as proof of total depravity ; but if it be not found in the texts already selected, few, I believe, will hold it as a doctrine of revelation.

● I proceed,

2. To analyze the human constitution, and to review those actions of men which the most naturally

flow from constitutional principles, that we may determine whether these indicate total depravity.

Instinctive principles are implanted in us, which in a thousand ways operate without our volition, to induce us to make the necessary efforts to preserve our lives, and to promote the purposes of our existence. Appetites and passions stimulate us to the acquisition of the objects of their appointment.— We possess social affections, which animate us to benevolent exertions ; and their strength is in proportion to the nearness of those associated with us, to the degree of their dependence on us, and the means we possess to do them good ; and we are imbued with reason and conscience, which qualify us for our duty as the subjects of a moral government. Power is given us to regulate all our active faculties ; and scope is granted for their harmonious exercise. As the workmanship of God, how wonderful is man ! What affection is redundant ? What passion is useless ? What principle is necessarily productive of evil ? Self-love often becomes inordinate, and is the occasion of mean and base actions ; but divest man of this principle, and what efficient motive can you address to his mind to induce him to the constant care and continued effort necessary to preserve life, and secure the design of his being. To society, it certainly is no small gain, that each individual keeps in his own place, and minds his own business : hereby the common concerns of the community are effectually carried on. As in a well-regulated machine, each one performing his appropriate part, an useful end is secured.

The love of property frequently degenerates into avarice, and extortion and oppression ensue ; but without the love of property, what becomes of the many advantages which result from industry and economy ? By destroying the principle, you make a sacrifice of all these beneficial effects of it. The evils of abundant wealth generally have their remedy in their consequences. The miser dies, and his accumulated heap is distributed to promote the comfort of many individuals, and to subserve the most useful purposes of society ; even as accumulated waters are by small rivulets drawn off to moisten and fertilize widely-extended plains.

Lawless ambition is productive of incalculable injury to society ; but the love of distinction, the natural affection, is the legitimate principle of the greatest enterprizes, and the noblest plans, by which the world has been benefited. In every instance, man becomes guilty when he permits his animal passions and worldly propensities to gain an ascendancy over his reason and conscience, the great law of his mind.

When we leave human nature, as we view it in its constituent principles, and attend to the representation of it by Calvinistick divines, we find every beauty defaced, and a picture deformed and offensive rises to our view ; but will observation on the general actions of men support the statement ? Was it true that man by nature is totally depraved, and that at the new birth a principle of holiness is implanted of habitual influence, the difference in the tempers and practices would be so great between saints and sinners, that in society they might be sep-

parated with the certainty with which the shepherd divides the white from the black of his flocks. Is this practicable? The characters of men in active life, do not correspond with the description given either of the natural or the converted man. Men are neither angels nor demons; in our intercourse with the world, we every where find mixed characters, and observe the different shades of virtue and vice from the highest state of the Christian down to the lowest condition of the sinner. Our observations on every class in society will lead us to reject the doctrine of total depravity. Children, before they learn dissembling from those about them, are proverbially examples of innocence and truth. In understanding, says the Apostle, be ye men, but in malice be children; and our Saviour himself represents the purity of the child as an emblem of the disposition of the inhabitants of heaven. If all men were totally depraved, from them we could expect only malevolent actions. Does experience justify the expectation? No. By no means. We place great confidence in the truth and benevolence of men in our common communications with them. In instances without number we call even on strangers for information and assistance, and the many who inform and assist us in our need are not denominated unnatural men; but the few, who deceive, and deny this aid, are thus called. The wonder is not, that men in general are ready to help a fellow-being, but that any should refuse to join in common offices of humanity.

The worst sinner, judged by his actions, will not be found so corrupt and depraved, as all men

are represented to be in a state of nature. No man is wholly given up to impiety and malevolence. In common cases, the doctrine of habits proves that men are not totally depraved. Sinners grow worse and worse, not as their capacity is enlarged and their means to do evil is increased; but as the habit of vice acquires strength in their minds. Can a measure be more than full?

I conclude.

Abstract opinions have not the influence on the religious practices of men, which before experiment might be expected. Reason, conscience, the moral sense are constantly rising to counteract the influence of a false theory: the natural principles of that very moral constitution in man, which is pronounced to be totally depraved, often prove superior to the bad tendency of gross speculative errors. Yet it cannot be a matter of indifference whether the human mind be in the possession of truth or error. Error clouds the understanding, and doubtless has a tendency to corrupt the heart. The man, whose opinions are erroneous, must take his religious steps in darkness, and with uncertainty. Truth enlightens the mind, and has the best influence on the affections. The man, whose mind is enriched with truth, holds his religious course in the clearness of day, and with the satisfaction and safety of light.

Do you believe, my Christian brethren, that God has given you the power of self-government—that he has entrusted the various principles of your constitution to your management? Do you believe that endless felicity is suspended on the wise and sober

regulation of your active faculties? Sacred, then, is your duty, as the subjects of the moral government of God; and you can have no excuse for the neglect of its performance. They who hold to the moral inability of man, seem to have an apology for inattention to the ordinary means of improvement; and yet many of them are bright examples of the simplicity and godly sincerity recommended by the gospel. But to those, who believe that life and death are set before every individual of mankind, and that, under God, each is left freely to make his election between the immortal rewards promised to piety, righteousness and sobriety, and the pains and penalties of the second death, designed as the punishment of an habitual course of sensuality and vice, no vindication is left for inattention and negligence in moral life. God has in the best manner adjusted the circumstances of our probation to discipline our passions, to establish religious principles in our hearts, and aid us in forming habits of purity and goodness. By the trials of this world, we are to acquire a moral disposition for the happiness of heaven. Let us then take to ourselves the whole armour of God, that we may resist every weight, even the sin that does the most easily beset us.

SERMON XVIII.

ON EFFECTUAL CALLING.

2 CORINTHIANS iii. 5.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves : our sufficiency is of God.

IN our previous context, St. Paul declares to the Corinthians—"Ye are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart." In our text, he informs them, that he and other preachers of the gospel were not of themselves sufficient, by their own wisdom, to devise the scheme of man's salvation ; nor, by their own strength, to carry into execution the merciful purpose of converting Jew and Gentile to the faith and virtues of the gospel ; but their sufficiency was of God, who appointed his own Son to be the saviour of men, who adopted efficient measures to establish Christianity among the nations, and who imparted to the first preachers of the gospel all the powers necessary to accomplish the high design of their commission, as the apostles of salvation.

This passage of scripture therefore must be a suitable text for the consideration of the fourth fundamental article of the Calvinistick system of theology, viz.

4. "All whom God has predestinated unto life, he is pleased, in his own time, effectually to call by his word and spirit, out of the state of sin and death in which they were by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ."

The proposition now stated necessarily results from the previous parts of the system of Calvin. If all men be totally depraved in consequence of Adam's sin; if they be naturally incapable of any religious act; if God elected only a particular number to salvation, and reprobated all others; and if Christ died only for the elect—it clearly follows, that to the effectual calling and sanctification of the elect, the irresistible operations of the Divine Spirit are necessary. But if this proposition be indeed a Christian truth, the plain inference is, that men, in a state of nature, have no religious act to perform. Duty extends not beyond the natural power of the agent. On this scheme, what motive can consistently be applied to the sinner, to induce him to the use of means in the concerns of salvation? But the observations made in former discourses have a direct bearing on the connected positions of Calvinism; and I shall not repeat them. In handling our subject, I shall adopt a course which I trust will be more useful, viz.

1. To state the measures which God has been pleased to adopt for the salvation of men, without regard to human views or endeavours.

2. To state the agency which the scriptures assign to men in the Christian plan of salvation.

3. To define the nature of conversion, or describe the change which takes place in the character of the sinner, who is effectually called.

1. To state the measures which God has been pleased to adopt for the salvation of men, without regard to human views or endeavours.

All men, who read the bible, will admit that the sacred writers ascribe the salvation of man, at least in part, to the grace and mercy of God, without any regard to the moral agency or moral goodness of man himself.—“God so loved the world,” says, St. John, (iii. 16) “that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The language of St. Paul is full on this point. (Rom. v. 8.) “God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in Christ Jesus, that in ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Eph. ii. 4—8.

From these and many other passages of the bible, it is evident that the plan of our salvation originated in the goodness of God, and that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, in his mercy into our world to proclaim to us the glad tidings of peace and life,

without any consideration of works of righteousness in men themselves. From these passages and others which bear a language like our text—"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves—our sufficiency is of God."—"It is God who worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. ii. 13.) Many have adopted the opinion that the best works of man have no connexion with their acceptance in the sight of God; that their justification depends in no degree on their own endeavours. The whole business of salvation, they imagine, is accomplished by the sovereign and irresistible grace of God. According to their representation, men are no more agents in the personal preparation for heaven, than they were in the establishment of the general conditions of salvation. But this statement of the doctrine of divine acceptance to me appears to be inconsistent with other passages of the New Testament which will be introduced under the next head of our discourse; and the texts brought to support the position in their apparent sense teach a doctrine far more congruous with our most enlightened apprehensions of a perfect moral government.

God is the father as well as the judge of mankind. All the blessings which we receive from him as the creator and the benevolent parent and friend of his rational offspring—all flow from his goodness and mercy. God receives no profit from our services. In justice we can have no claim on him. For our existence, and for all the enjoyments of the present life, we are under obligations of gratitude.

In the natural world, men have consistent notions of their dependence on Heaven. They all readily acknowledge that in God they live, move, and have their being. At the same time, our labours are made necessary for the attainment of the purposes of the life that now is. Did men carry the same ideas into the moral world, they might form clear perceptions of their dependence on God in the concerns of their salvation: they might fully understand what God has already accomplished for our immortal happiness, and what we must do to prepare ourselves for it.

We are absolutely dependent on God for the whole plan of salvation, and for all the means and assistance with which we are favoured, as men and as Christians. God, in his benevolence, appointed his Son to be our saviour; and with him he grants us all things pertaining to godliness and life eternal. It is of divine goodness that we are called to knowledge and virtue, to glory and immortality; that exceeding great and precious promises are made us; that we are placed in a situation the most favourable to form habits of Christian piety and virtue, as the necessary preparation for the happiness of an immortal state. It is of divine mercy that pardon is extended to the repenting sinner, and that our weak and imperfect services are accepted as a compliance with the conditions of salvation.

Every intelligent, moral being is under obligations to act agreeably to the law of his nature; and for every wilful offence he may justly be punished. But when men had sinned against God, he constituted Jesus Christ the mediator of a covenant of

grace and mercy, that sinners through him might obtain pardon and life. Christ appeared on earth to announce to a guilty world the terms of pardon and favour; to instruct men in all truth pertaining to life eternal; to teach them every moral duty; to propose the remission of sin on repentance; and to promise eternal life on the condition of faith and obedience.

Christ has cast light through the valley of death, and made the path to heaven plain for all who are disposed to walk in it. In his own life he has given the brightest exemplification of the virtues and graces of his religion. His requisitions are adapted to our present powers and condition of being. He has established institutions fitted to inspire us with zeal, and to animate our diligence and fortify our resolution in the maintenance of the character of his disciple; he has promised us all necessary assistance to enable us to comply with the part assigned us in the business pertaining to immortal life and immortal glory. These benefits and advantages of Christianity apply to all men indiscriminately. Men have one Father, even God: Christians have one Master, even Christ. Christianity is addressed to all the nations and all the generations of men. All men are invited to attend to the manifestation of divine power, wisdom and goodness in the establishment of our religion, that they may profess their faith in its divine origin; and to all true professors equal assistance, support, and favour are promised. The New Testament contains not the least intimation that the benefits and privileges of Christianity were designed only for a particular description of

people, and that others are necessarily excluded from them. The commission which Christ gave to his apostles was delivered in the most general language, and nothing appears to limit its signification. The conduct of the apostles proves that they understood the order of their Master literally, when he directed them and their successors to preach the gospel to every man. All the above benefits and privileges flow from the free grace and mercy of God.

The world of mankind, having subjected themselves to the dominion of sin, could lay no claim to the rewards of virtue in a future state. In the service of the best of men there is not merit which God in justice must reward. God was under no moral obligation to instruct men, who had perverted their reason and abused their liberty, by revelation, in the nature of true religion; to propose to them pardon and salvation through the medium of a new covenant, and to favour them with distinguished advantages as the means of a moral preparation for endless happiness in the kingdom of heaven. But God, in his benevolence and mercy, was pleased to confer these inestimable blessings on the family of man. It pleased him to make his own Son the mediator of them. For these glorious manifestations of divine grace and mercy, we are under the most sacred obligations of love and gratitude to God.

But these benefits and privileges do not include the salvation of all men. All men are interested in them. By Jesus Christ, all men are redeemed from

the dominion of death, and are placed in a state of probation, candidates for immortal life, on the most gracious conditions. The privileges of the gospel are common to the whole human family. By the Christian dispensation, Jew and Gentile, bond and free are made one. In this respect no difference is made between nominal and real disciples. All are entitled to equal benefits, and are put in possession of equal external advantages. But the sacred writers make a great difference between sincere Christians and hypocritical professors. The kingdom of heaven, said our Saviour, is like a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind ; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire ; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

This passage of scripture, will, I should suppose, bear only the following comment. The Christian dispensation is designed for the whole human race, and all men are favoured with its privileges and assistance. In these respects God appears as a common parent, and bestows his favours alike on all. But in the issue of the divine administrations, when the works of men shall be brought into judgment, then will God their judge, make a difference between hypocritical and sincere professors,—between those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, and they who maintain faith and a good conscience. The obedient Christian will be admitted to those heavenly mansions, which Christ has gone to pre-

pare in his Father's house for his real disciples ; the disobedient professor will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

In the allusion to the marriage feast, there is also the clearest representation made of the moral purposes of God towards the children of men. The Jews, who were first favoured with divine revelation, for their abuse of it, were rejected ; and the privileges of the Christian institution were extended to all nations of the earth, and to the individuals of every nation. These are all the free gifts of God : they flow from divine goodness and mercy. But among the invited guests, there was one who had not on the wedding garment : he was destitute of the necessary qualifications for the enjoyment of heaven. When charged with a want of these qualifications, he was speechless : conscious that his deficiency was criminal, he was unable to make any justification : convicted in his own mind, he answered not, but silently submitted to the sentence of expulsion. These representations to me fully prove that the blessings of the gospel which are granted to mankind through the mediation and ministry of Jesus Christ, and which flow wholly from the grace and mercy of God, without any consideration of works of righteousness performed by men, consist in religious and moral instruction—in the promise of the pardon of the penitent sinner—in the assistance provided for those of an honest mind and teachable temper ; and in the assurance of future happiness to all, who under these means acquire habits of piety and virtue. In a word, these consist in the privileges and benefits which have been enumerat-

ed ; but to render these Christian means of salvation effectual, they must be improved. All those passages of the New Testament, which speak of Christ as bearing our transgression, being a propitiation for our sins, being our righteousness, &c. are descriptive of the methods which God has adopted, through the ministrations of Christ Jesus to deliver us from the habit and the guilt of sin.

SERMON XIX.

EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ;
for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do
of his good pleasure.*

YOU will recollect that I proposed reviewing the fourth article of the Calvinistick creed under three distinct propositions. The second of these is the subject of our present discourse, viz.

2. To state the agency which the scriptures assign to men in the Christian plan of salvation.

Salvation is placed within the attainment of every individual of the human family. God, who gave existence to man, designed that existence as a blessing, and he grants every degree of power and instruction necessary to enable him to obtain the happiness presented to his contemplation, as the reward of his virtuous efforts. By the mediation and ministry of Jesus Christ, every thing has been accomplished for our salvation which is consistent with our intellectual and moral natures. Our Father in heaven has, by his Son, redeemed us from

the bondage of sin and the empire of death. He hath clearly instructed us in our duty, and promised to support us under all its conflicts. He invites, he persuades, he commands us to obey his laws, that we may be happy. While men were sinners, God appointed his own Son to be their saviour, and of his own goodness taught us the path of life ; yet he treats us as the subjects of a moral government ; and when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, he will reward them according to their works.

Though Jesus has called us to life eternal, made us partakers of the privileges of the sons of God, and adopted us into his family ; yet if we abuse the privileges of children, and hold the truth in unrighteousness, we shall be excluded from the future kingdom of God. To make our calling and election sure, we must imbibe the temper of the gospel, and in practice give an exemplification of the virtues and graces of our religion. As a preparation for heaven, we must be formed to a likeness of the character of the Divine Author of our religion. When we seriously attend to the passages of scripture which make this improvement of our Christian privileges essential to salvation, we shall perceive a perfect harmony between them and those passages which represent salvation to be the free gift of God. Besides the places in the New Testament, in which the sacred writers expressly treat of the day of judgment, and in which they most explicitly declare that men shall be judged according to their works, I might mention particularly the parables of the Virgins, and the Talents. These and most

of the lectures of our Saviour were intended to illustrate the moral condition of mankind under his reign, and they all show the necessity of improving the means of religion to secure its rewards ; they all state that the privileges of the gospel are freely granted, and that all men are invited to lay hold on life eternal. The invitation of the gospel is universal. “ Ho ! every one that thirsteth ; come ye to the waters of life. He that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat ; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” All men are endowed with a capacity for improvement in rational and moral life : all who possess the gospel are alike favoured by its instruction and assistance ; and yet we are in the clearest manner informed that at the coming of Christ to judgment, some of his nominal disciples will be made heirs of the heavenly inheritance, and others banished from the kingdom of God. The reason of this difference rests with men themselves. Some in the state of probation wisely improve the means of knowledge, piety, and virtue, and thereby qualify themselves for the happiness of heaven ; others pass the period of their probation without improvement, and in the day of account they will be found destitute of the qualifications of the Christian character ; they will therefore be condemned, and their punishment aggravated in proportion to the extent of means which they abused.

Men, in different proportions, possess the powers of intellectual and free agents ; and hereafter an account will be required of the manner in which each talent has been managed. Men differ in their intellectual and moral faculties, and individuals must

account only for talents committed to their management. Men are accountable for what they have, and not for what they have not. Their future rewards will be proportioned to attainments actually made under their respective circumstances.

To all observations of this nature, some may reply—Moral preparations are indeed absolutely requisite for salvation. No one will be admitted to heaven, who in the present world is not conformed to the image of God. Men must become the children, before they can be made the heirs of God. The very question is—Can they of themselves acquire the necessary qualifications for heaven? Can they, in their own power, form in their souls the image of their Creator? I answer, We possess nothing which we did not receive; and if we received all our powers from God, why should we glory as though we received them not? The pretence to independent power or agency in a creature is preposterous. But our Maker formed us free moral agents, and he has appointed the method by which the true end of our existence may be obtained. God has fitted the earth to yield its increase for the present support of man, and he prospers the tiller of the ground in his labours; but he who labours not during seed time, will not gather in the appointed weeks of harvest. God in mercy has, by Jesus Christ, promised eternal life to all, who by a patient continuance in the ways of well doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality; but they who do not comply with the condition, can have no claim to the reward. Be not deceived: God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he

also reap ; he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting ; and let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

The plan of the gospel was adopted to remedy the effects of the apostacy. Its conditions are suited to the powers of man in his present state. The gospel views man in all his weakness, and its requisitions are fitted to his actual ability.

Neither writers on the terms of salvation by Jesus Christ, nor Christians generally in their inquiries on this subject, seem to have sufficiently attended to this consideration. The question is not, whether man has the power to yield sinless obedience to a perfect law, and thereby to entitle himself to the reward, which the law provides for services which are absolutely perfect ; but whether man has the power to comply with those conditions of divine acceptance which Christ has established. The gospel removes those impediments, that obstructed the path of man in his course to the goal, at which he was to receive the rewards of obedience. Christianity in its very nature is remedial : it presupposes defection in man : it was established after the degradation of the human race, and all its requirements are suited to their present condition.

When the scriptures assert that where sin abounded grace did more abound, it is an impeachment of the wisdom as well as the goodness of God, to say, that the remedy provided by the gospel for the effects of the apostacy is not complete ; that the new

order of government is not suited to the capacity of its subjects. Are the administrations of God inadequate to their designed purpose? Can the measures of his adoption fail of reaching the intended object? Impossible. The gospel is altogether calculated for man with his present powers of action; and he is as capable of complying with its demands, as Adam originally was to comply with the requisitions of the first law. The supposition that man is unable to comply with the conditions of acceptance with his Maker, reflects the highest dishonour on the wisdom, the benevolence, and the justice of God. If I be a father, says God, where is mine honour? If God be a father, shall we attribute to him that government over his family, which to impute to any earthly parent would be considered as affrontive? Shall we make God, not merely like, but worse than men?

When we represent the Christian dispensation to be adapted to the human capacity, and requiring from men a service they possess the power to perform; when we state that God grants all the well-disposed subjects of his government the assistance which is suited to the capacity of an accountable being, and at the same time requires them to co-operate with him, by the proper exercise of the strength he has given them—we attribute to God the glory of an affectionate parent, the glory of a merciful and benevolent governour, and a just and righteous judge. But when we describe God as a being, who does not adapt the constitution of his government to the capacities of his creatures, who are the subjects of it; who forces some, by his own irresistible power,

to obey his laws, and then loves and rewards them for this forced obedience ; while he denies his aid to the majority of his family, who can make no effectual effort without his special assistance ; and hates them for lying in the impotence, where he placed them, and decreed that they should lie ; and at last punishes them with everlasting misery for not doing that, which he determined they never should do, and denied them the power to accomplish—then we ascribe to God the glory, if any glory, of a despotick, cruel being ; the glory of a tyrant, who makes to himself favourites from the mere dictates of a capricious mind ; who loves and hates his subjects from blind prejudice ; who rewards and punishes them without any regard to intrinsick worth of character. Far be this imputation from our blessed God. Far be it from God that he should do iniquity, and from the Almighty that he should pervert justice. The works of a man he will render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.

Does it not then appear, that the Calvinistick doctrine of effectual calling is opposed to the plainest declarations of scripture, and to the clearest dictates of reason ?

To the satisfactory illustration of our subject, it is now, I trust, only necessary to notice one or two objections that may be raised against the general representations made.

It may perhaps be said, that the argument adduced to prove the efficiency of Christianity, to remedy the effects of the apostacy, if admitted, will prove the universal salvation of men. The

doctrine of universal salvation, will, by the leave of Providence, be particularly considered at some future time. For the present purpose, I answer—Man is the subject of a moral government: he is an accountable being. His acceptance with God is suspended on the wise exercise of his free and active powers. Christianity places all men in a state of salvation; but it does no violence to the moral ability of man. It suits its requirements to the present abilities of human nature; and it makes human endeavours necessary to qualify men for the enjoyment of its final rewards. In one word, man, on the Christian plan, is a candidate for the happiness which flows from a good disposition, and from habits of piety and virtue; and they alone of the human family are qualified for salvation, who in such a manner improve the means of the gospel, as to form that disposition, and establish these habits.

Others may say, that the ability above ascribed to man, in his religious duty, is irreconcilable with those passages of scripture which refer to divine influence in the formation of the human character to Christian piety and virtue. To this objection, I reply.—Those influences are applied to the moral nature of man, and are consistent with the free exercise of his intellectual and moral power. These aids we are gratefully to receive as a part of the gracious provisions of the gospel. For our encouragement in the important business of this world, we have the promise of God to assist and to succeed our honest endeavours. He has promised that seed-time and harvest shall never fail. Though our exertions have no efficiency in vegetation, yet our

sowing is made indispensable to the blessings of harvest. For our encouragement in the concerns of moral life, though we can merit nothing by our works, yet God in his mercy has graciously promised effectual aid to all those, who with earnestness engage in the business of life eternal. Without our own endeavours, we may not expect that the moral purpose of our probation will be accomplished. If we ourselves are serious, diligent, and persevering in the endeavour to work out our own salvation, we have the assurance that the strength of God will be made perfect in our weakness, and that finally we shall be found of our Judge in peace, without spot and blameless, and shall be crowned with the wreath of immortality.

I close, with one or two general reflections.

1. The gracious provisions of the gospel fully manifest the goodness and mercy of our God; and these furnish the highest motives for gratitude, love and obedience in us. God is the parent of our lives, and the author of all our blessings. He bestows his favours in the most disinterested manner, and with the same parental regard beholds all the members of the human family. By his son Jesus Christ he has provided a remedy for the pollutions of guilt, instructed us in the duties of life, and promised to support his dutiful children under all the trials of the world; and to conduct them to honour, glory, and immortality in heaven. These blessings, when realized, must move the hearts of every individual who will seriously reflect on them, and raise him above the follies and vices of the present state.

When the Christian diligently studies the gospel, he will find that it is fitted to enkindle the flame of gratitude and devotion in his breast, and to lead him to a life of piety, righteousness and sobriety. When he impartially attends to the writings of the evangelists and apostles, he will perceive that they uniformly apply the instructions and motives of the gospel to these important purposes.

2. From our subject we learn, that it is not a small and uncertain number, who are by Jesus Christ freed from the bondage of sin and death, while the majority of mankind are doomed by a sovereign decree to guilt and wretchedness. The declarations of the gospel are widely different. In it men are dissuaded from sin by a view of the terrors of future condemnation; they are animated to the performance of Christian duty by a promise of assistance and reward. The proposals of salvation are not limited. We may then all with the highest confidence rest our hopes on God; for though we can have no claim on his justice, yet his merciful promise gives us the highest possible security. If we perform faithfully the part assigned us in our salvation, we may be assured that God will be mindful of his covenant, and will reward our labours with the crown of immortal life.

Let us then, my Christian brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, not satisfy ourselves with the exclamation of Lord, Lord; but may we also be careful to do the things, which Jesus has commanded us. Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, let us live soberly, righteously and piously in this present world.

SERMON XX.

ON CONVERSION.

JOHN iii. 3.

*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

THE third proposition under the fourth article of the Calvinistick creed, is our present subject, viz.—

3. To define the nature of conversion, or describe the change which takes place in the character of the sinner, who is effectually called.

The declaration contained in our text was made by our Saviour to Nicodemus. He had seen the mighty works of Jesus, and was by them convinced of his divine mission. Not possessing resolution publickly to profess him as the Messiah, he came to him by night for religious instruction. Our text is the reply to a question of this inquisitive but wavering Pharisee. The Pharisees made external rites and forms the essence of religion. Our

Saviour informed Nicodemus, that, to become his disciple, a man like the Pharisees must change his opinions, his disposition, and practice. The great body of the Jews and Gentiles were so corrupt, that he who was renovated to the spirit and habits of pure religion, might, by an apt figure, be said to be born again.

The sense of our text is fully expressed by the apostle Peter. "God hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue ; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

In the consideration of our subject, I shall,

1. Inquire into the scriptural meaning of the term, Conversion.

2. Review some passages of the New Testament, which describe the requisite qualifications of the Christian character in other phraseology than conversion, or regeneration.

3. State the proof that may satisfy men that they are Christians, and are prepared for the rewards which God, in his munificence, has provided for the faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. To inquire into the scriptural meaning of the term, Conversion.

In the New Testament, the term Conversion is sometimes used to express the change from one religion to another. "Paul and Barnabas declared the conversion of the Gentiles." They renounced

* 2 Peter, i. 3, 4.

Paganism, and embraced Christianity. Conversion in this sense may be a change merely of opinion, and not of the heart. In the history of the bible, instances occur of individuals who were good men before this change ; and of others, who after it were sinners. Cornelius, before his conversion to Christianity, was “a devout man : he feared God, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” Simon Magus was converted to the Christian faith : he believed and was baptized ; yet, after this, St. Peter pronounced him to be in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Conversion, in this sense, has no reference to those who are educated under the institutions of the gospel.

In the epistles of the New Testament addressed to converted heathen, the writers, particularly St. Paul, make frequent allusion to their former state of ignorance, superstition, and sin. To the Ephesians, Paul remarks—“ You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”* That the apostle here alludes to the corruptions of their Gentile state, from which they were reclaimed by the gospel, is evident ; for he observes, that, before their conversion, they were “ Gentiles in the flesh, without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise ; having no hope, and

* Eph. ii. 1, 2.

without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ; for he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall between us. Now, therefore," he adds, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."* The difference between the religious condition of Gentiles and Christians is so great, that observations made respecting the former will not apply to the latter. The Gentiles entertained unworthy apprehensions of the Deity; they were confused in their opinions respecting a future state, and were almost destitute of motives to piety and virtue. Christians are made acquainted with the character and government of God; they are called, by the clearest instruction and the most persuasive motives, to knowledge and virtue, to glory and immortality. Wickedness in Christians is therefore threatened with punishment aggravated in degree, proportionate to their superiour means of improvement.

Let us attend to the general meaning of the sacred writers, when they speak of the conversion of the sinner.

To render men meet for the rest of saints in the kingdom of light, the dominion of sin must be subdued, the love of God implanted in the heart, and, where opportunity is afforded, a habit of Christian piety and virtue formed. Without these qualifications, men are not fitted for the employments or the happiness of heaven. Some suppose that the

* Eph. ii. 11—14, 19.

change from the blindness and the dominion of sin to the light and the power of godliness, is instantly produced in the human mind. Some even require that the patient should be able to describe the several stages of conviction, and state the moment of the new birth. I find no support for this doctrine in the bible. In itself, I apprehend it to be very erroneous, and, in its consequences, extremely dangerous. It is dangerous, because he who supposes that a man is instantaneously fitted for heaven by the irresistible operations of the Divine Spirit, is apt to impute the mere movements of animal nature to heavenly influence, and to mistake the excitement of his passions for conversion. When an individual of an ardent imagination can persuade himself that he has experienced this sudden change, he deems himself secured from offences which will hazard his salvation; and from his holy mount, he looks down upon his fellow-beings who have less assurance than himself, as upon a blind and reprobate world. He forms a judgment of the Christian attainments of men, not from their practices, which are open to his inspection, but from internal operations, which are hidden from human view, and to which the wild enthusiast or the artful hypocrite oftener lays claim, than the man of a sound mind and pure heart. He who can persuade himself that he has been instantaneously converted, supposes his title to heaven to be sure; and if he fall into heinous sins, he considers them as mere frailties of human nature, and not offences which are a forfeiture of the Christian character. A person of this description is prone to cherish vanity and spiritual pride;

and too often he in an unchristian manner censures those, who from diffidence are restrained from rising to his lofty pretensions. The case of St. Paul may, perhaps, be mentioned as an instance of instantaneous conversion. But this case cannot be applied to men generally. He was appointed by God to be the distinguished apostle of the Gentiles, and a miracle was wrought in his favour. His conversion was from a mistaken notion of the Jewish religion to a consistent belief of Christianity. He informs us, that as a Jew, he had lived in all good conscience before God; and that, even in his persecution of Christians, he thought he was doing God service. In this transaction he was inflamed by an honest, though mistaken zeal. In what degree he was culpable in rejecting the proof of the divine mission of Jesus Christ, till conviction in a miraculous manner was forced upon him, is not our province to determine. But clearly the difference between Paul, who was actuated by an honest though erroneous zeal, and the man who wilfully and habitually violates the commands of God, is so great, that no comparison can be made between them. After his conversion to Christianity, this apostle declared—"I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Contemplating his danger, he forms a solemn resolution to persevere, lest having been a preacher of the gospel, he should himself be a cast-away. It does not then appear, that Paul rested on his instantaneous conversion, and thought himself thereby assured of heaven.

* Phil. iii. 13, 14.

Our text has often been adduced in proof of the doctrine of instantaneous conversion. But does it support the position? Nicodemus at first understood our Saviour in a literal sense; but the subsequent verses show that the language is figurative, and illustrate the meaning of the passage. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Unless a man, under the influence of the Spirit of God, be formed to moral purity, he cannot enter my kingdom, of which baptism by water is the initial sign.—"That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Was it possible for a man to be born literally a second time, he still would be born a man, and would mind animal things; but he who is born of the Spirit is formed into a likeness of the divine image, and he regards his spiritual, his moral improvement. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is not visible, nor can its origin be explored; but its effects are apparent: and in moral life, the influences of the Spirit are not to be discerned by us; but when cherished, their fruits are evident. In religious concerns, you cannot distinguish between the influence of the Spirit of God and the suggestions of your own minds. But though you be not certain that particular feelings and actions originated in divine impulse, yet if you perceive that the love of vice is subdued in your

hearts, and you be conscious of a sincere endeavour to live in the habitual exercise of all Christian graces and virtues, you may with safety rest in the persuasion, that the influences of the Divine Spirit have been effectually cherished.

The Jews were accustomed to immerse in water a convert from paganism to their religion. They considered this change as being born again, and denominated the proselyte a new man.* The knowledge of this custom enables us to perceive the force of the question of our Saviour to Nicodemus—“Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

Conversion, in the scriptural sense of the phrase, signifies a change of the mind, placing the affections on new objects, altering the conduct, adopting a new course of life. The sinner, in his conversion, loses his fondness for vice, and acquires the love of goodness. In the original language, the same word which in our translation is rendered *convert*, or *conversion*, is frequently used to express the action of a man *turning himself about*, altering the course of his steps, going out of one path into another. That every reader may judge of the correctness of this remark, I will mention a number of places, where the same Greek word expresses these several affections and actions. Matt. xiii. 15, our Saviour, speaking of the Jews, repeats the prophecy of Isaiah—“This people’s heart is waxed gross, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their

* See Goadby’s illustration, and Whitby on John iii. 3, &c.

hearts, and should be *converted*, and I should heal them." The word here translated *converted*, is the same, the difference of mode and tense excepted, which in Luke xvii. 31, is rendered *return*.—"He that is in the field, let him likewise not *return* back." The same word is used in Acts xxvi. 18, and translated *to turn to*—"To *turn* them from darkness *to* light." In Matt. xviii. 3, we read, "Jesus said, Except ye be *converted*, and become as little children." The word here translated *converted*, is, in Luke xiv. 25, rendered *turned*, that is, to turn the body—"Great multitudes were with him; and he *turned*, and said unto them." In Acts iii. 19, Peter exhorts his hearers to repent and be converted. The word here translated *converted*, in 2 Cor. iii. 16, is rendered *turn*—"When it shall *turn* to the Lord." In 2 Peter ii. 21, the same word is rendered *turn from*—"It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, *to turn from* the holy commandment delivered unto them. In these passages the same word is translated to be converted, to turn the body, to turn to the Lord, and to turn away from him, or from his holy commandment. In James v. 19, 20, this apostle observes—"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one *convert* him, let him know, that he who *converteth* a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." The word rendered *convert* and *converteth*, in 2 Peter ii. 22, is rendered *turned*—"It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is *turned* to his own vomit again."

Other examples might be adduced ; but these are sufficient, I trust, to show that conversion, or regeneration, in the New Testament, means a change of the affections from vicious to virtuous objects, altering the course of one's life, the formation of Christian habits. The man who has given an uncontrolled indulgence to irregular passions, and formed habits of vice, under divine influence corrects the disordered affections of his mind, and subdues the corrupt propensities of his heart. He ceases to do evil, and learns to do well. By the diligent study of the truths, and by the serious observance of the directions of the gospel, he acquires the qualifications of the Christian character. By adding to his faith the graces and virtues of his religion, he makes his calling and election sure. Having learned how he ought to walk and please God, he abounds more and more in every good word and work. From the commencement of the Christian life, he makes constant progress in the path of goodness ; and with quickened steps he presses towards the goal of perfection. Such is the conversion and sanctification which the sacred writers declare to be essential to our acceptance with God. These are the attainments which are the moral purpose of a probationary state. This purpose cannot instantaneously be accomplished. Christian qualifications are slowly acquired.

Many providential occurrences may take place to stop a sinner in his course of iniquity, and to induce him to form the resolution to amend his life ; but it requires time, care, and labour, to wean the affections from vicious indulgences, to break the

force of corrupt habits, to enkindle in the heart the love of religion, and to establish a disposition habitually virtuous and holy.

From the preceding observations it will appear, that the experiences of one man in his conversion furnish no rule by which the Christian attainments of another may be tested. This individual was early taught the truths of the gospel. The seeds of Christian piety and virtue were sown in his infant mind, and, by the blessing of Heaven, these were nourished, and yielded fruit. "Religious principles grew with his growth; and were strengthened with his strength." His life from his youth, though attended with weakness and infirmity, was sober and virtuous; he habitually lived in the fear of God, and in view of a future judgment; and his hoary head in advanced life is a crown of glory, he being found in the way of righteousness. This man never experienced the compunctions and conflicts which the sinner in conversion experiences; his life was a continuous course of progressive improvements in Christian knowledge and virtue.

That individual was a profligate in youth; he early formed habits of vice, and for years lived in the wilful indulgence of the worst passions of human nature. By some impressive dispensation of Divine Providence, this abandoned character was brought to serious reflection: death was placed in near prospect before him: he pondered on the retributions of the final judgment, and was terrified by the contemplation: his mind was overwhelmed by a view of his impending destruction: he keenly

felt the sting of an accusing conscience : his past sins arose to his contemplation in all their turpitude and guilt : he reflected upon the infinite blessings which God has conferred on sinful men by Jesus Christ ; and, in the bitterness of his sorrow that he had neglected to embrace the offered salvation, he cried to God for grace and mercy. By divine assistance he is enabled to conquer his vicious habits, and to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. Attaining to an habitual state of piety and virtue, he becomes prepared for heaven. This man, in the attainment of the qualifications of the Christian character, widely differs from the former. His change was great, sudden and visible : he is able to state the time of his conversion, and to give a history of the circumstances which attended it. Between these two characters, the experience of Christians may differ through all the intermediate grades of vice and virtue. Some individuals may have been led to repentance by the threatenings of the gospel, and others allured to the paths of Christian duty by its promises. The change in one might have been sudden ; and in another it may have been more gradually produced, as the effect of reiterated instruction and entreaty. *This* man may date his conversion from a given time, and *that* can satisfy himself that he is a Christian only by a consciousness that religion has an abiding effect upon his temper and life.

In religion, men discover their constitutional complexion. Men of a grave and sedate tempera-
ture do not in religion express that warmth of feeling, nor in their devotions manifest the zeal and

fervour, which men of quick passions and ardent minds express and display. As in the interchange of common offices of good neighbourhood, and in the intercourse of friendship, men of cool and reserved dispositions do not make their declarations of esteem and regard in those impassioned expressions which are heard from those whose feelings are more nice and more easily excited; yet the former may be as sincere, and in all instances of trial may discover as great constancy, and by their actions manifest as high effects of real friendship and humanity. In like manner, amidst the conflicts of Christian virtue, men of cool and reserved tempers may prove themselves as well grounded and settled in their religion, discover as great strength of moral principle, and in conduct display as much of the spirit of the gospel, as persons of more zealous and fervid minds.

2. To review some passages of the New Testament which describe the requisite qualifications of the Christian character in other phraseology than conversion, or regeneration.

The sacred writers describe the essential qualifications of the Christian character in various ways; but the several descriptions are in substance the same. In some places the word faith is used to express the principle of religion in the heart, and its effects upon the life. But faith, in this general sense, consists not in the mere assent of the mind to Christian truth, nor in the inefficacious application of the merits of Christ to ourselves. Saving faith works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. The Christian must hold faith

and a good conscience ; and they who put away a good conscience, make shipwreck of faith. “ The end of the Christian commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.”* In other places, repentance expresses the qualification of the character which will be accepted as the disciple of Christ Jesus. “ God to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”† But the essence of repentance consists not in mere sorrow and humiliation. Effectually to repent, is to subdue evil propensities, and to reform vicious practices. Attend to the description which the prophet gives of true repentance—“ Wash ye, make ye clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well ; seek judgment ; relieve the oppressed ; judge the fatherless ; plead for the widow.”‡ On this condition the prophet assures the offender that he shall be forgiven. “ Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”§ “ Paul showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”¶ In the epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul declares, “ In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.” In the same epistle he affirms—“ Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”|| In the first to the

* 1 Tim. i. 5, 19.

† Acts xi. 18.

‡ Isaiah i. 16, 17, 18.

† Acts xxvi. 20.

|| Gal. v. 6 ; vi. 15.

Corinthians, he says, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God."* And in the epistle to the Hebrews, he observes, "Christ, being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation to all them who obey him."† In these places, the essential qualifications of the Christian character are differently expressed; as by faith, the first principle of the Christian life; by the new birth, or the change from vice to virtue; by keeping the commandments of God, or evangelical obedience.—These several phrases convey the same meaning. Wherever the inspired writers express the sum and substance of religion by one leading principle of it, they include all essential graces and virtues as its fruits; and where they express the whole of religion by some primary virtue, they always include faith as its principle. The general term faith includes obedience; and evangelical obedience implies faith. The believing disciple, the humble penitent, the converted man, the obedient Christian, in scriptural phraseology, all delineate the same character.

We shall be brought to the same result, if we attend to those passages of the New Testament which describe the properties of which a man, when he becomes a Christian, divests himself, and the properties which he acquires; the practices which he renounces, and the practices which he adopts. The apostle Paul thus exhorts the Ephesian converts—"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt accord-

* 1 Cor. vii. 19.

† Heb. v. 9.

ing to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds ; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* In the preceding verses, he had observed—"This I say and testify in the Lord, that henceforth ye walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart ; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus ; that ye put off," &c. Evidently, then, the old man, which they were to put off, is a vain mind and a lascivious practice, to which Gentiles, through their blindness, gave themselves up with greediness ; and the new man, which they were to put on, is a conformity to the divine image, and the practice of righteousness and Christian virtue. A passage in the epistle to the Colossians fully explains the meaning of St. Paul in the use of the term old and new man.—"Put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouths. Lie not one to another ; seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another,

* Eph. iv. 22, &c.

and forgiving one another; and, above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”* The direction here is, that Christians should divest themselves of wicked inclinations, and abstain from evil practices, which the apostle denominates the old man; and that they imbue their minds with the spirit of the gospel, and give an exemplification of the Christian virtues; and these the apostle styles the new man.

Under this branch of our subject, it is pertinent to bring into view one or two passages of scripture, which define the fruits of the Spirit, or describe the effects of Christian principles, when, under divine influence, they become operative upon the hearts and lives of men. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, says—“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”† In the paraphrase of Dr. Macknight—“The fruit which reason, enlightened by the spirit of God, produceth, is love to God and man; joy, occasioned by that excellent affection; peace with all men; the patient bearing of injuries; a soft and complacent manner of speaking; a beneficent disposition; fidelity in promises and trusts; calmness under provocation; temperance in the use of meats and drinks.” To the Ephesians St. Paul observes—“The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” In the above paraphrase—“The fruit of the Spirit, by which ye are enlightened, consists in doing all good offices to your neighbours, and in

* Col. iii. 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14.

† Gal. v. 22, 23.

righteousness in your dealings, and truth in your speeches."

No comments are necessary to show that the fruits of the Spirit, in these passages, differ not from the moral virtues of the gospel. The man who cherishes divine influence, and yields Christian fruit, is the man who rectifies the evil propensities of his heart, and establishes habits of Christian piety and virtue. Religion, to be effectual, must, as a living principle, dwell in the heart of man, form his disposition, and regulate his life.

3. To state the proofs which may satisfy men that they are Christians, and are qualified for the rewards which God, in his munificence, has provided for the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

By their improvements in the Christian life, may men estimate their qualifications for heaven. If they find that the power of sin is subdued in their hearts, that their evil propensities are mortified, and that their religion produces the fruits of a good life, then they may be satisfied that they are prepared for the rewards of heaven. Men are differently constituted, and it cannot therefore be expected that they should agree in speculative opinions, or experience the same internal operations. But they may be united in sincerity. Every man may for himself determine whether it be his sincere desire and habitual endeavour to do the will of God, and to walk in the commandments of Jesus Christ, blameless. If, on the examination of himself by this rule, the heart of an individual condemn him not, then may he have confidence towards God. The deficiencies and defects of the Christian

should render him humble, and teach him his dependence on the goodness and mercy of God. But if the religion of Jesus be established in his mind, it will induce him to discipline his passions, to guard against the seductions of the world, and to live soberly, righteously, and piously. He will experience satisfaction and delight in the cultivation of the Christian temper, and in the exercise of the virtues of the gospel. No man ought to consider himself a real disciple of Jesus Christ, till he has put off the spirit and the deeds of sin, and put on the spirit and the deeds of righteousness. In this high concern, every one must be his own judge. The hearts of our fellow Christians are not open to our inspection ; but each one may examine his own. Every individual may determine whether his religious observances be assumed to subserve a worldly purpose, or whether he act from a regard to the authority of God ; whether he obey merely those precepts of his Divine Master which are congenial to his peculiar complexion of mind, and conducive to present interest, or have respect to all the commands of God ; whether he maintain only the semblance of goodness in publick, or his religion have its proper influence in private, and regulate his thoughts as well as actions. If he be conscious that religion has an abiding and universal influence on his heart and life, then he has evidence within his own mind that he is qualified to join the heavenly society.

On this foundation the apostles establish Christian hope. As men advance in the path of piety

and virtue, so may their hope of salvation increase ; and to that confirmed state of goodness may they in the present state attain, that their hope may be as an anchor to their souls, sure and steadfast. It may prove an unfailing source of consolation under the troubles of life, and raise them above the fear of death. But still it is hope, not assurance. These remarks are in conformity to the language of inspiration. We are directed to put on “for an helmet the hope of salvation.”* We are exhorted “not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel.”† We are informed, that through grace we are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life;‡ and we are directed to be diligent in the work of the Lord, in the full assurance of hope unto the end.§ But St. Paul declares that hope does not amount to assurance. “We are,” says he, “saved by hope : but hope that is seen is not hope ; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for ? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”|| That is, for the object of which we are absolutely certain, we cannot hope, hope being done away in knowledge ; but when we hope for some probable good, we may with patience wait the proper time of reception.

It is, then, vanity and presumption for Christians, in a probationary state to pretend to an assurance of salvation. The promises of the gospel are, indeed, absolutely certain to all who comply with the conditions of them ; but there is danger,

* 1 Thess. v. 8.

† Col. i. 23.

‡ Tit. iii. 7.

§ Heb. vi. 11.

|| Rom. viii. 24, 25.

through every period of our probationary state, that men will neglect to comply with the conditions of salvation. No professed Christian can be certain of his prize, till he has completed his race, nor sure of his reward, till he has arrived at his goal. It was at the close of his life, that St. Paul triumphed in the prospect of an immediate possession of the glorious wreath of immortality. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."* No man can with propriety adopt this language, till the decisive period shall arrive. It is dangerous for men, amidst the temptations of the world, to flatter themselves with a certainty of their salvation; to entertain the supposition, that they are so effectually established in Christian habits, that it is impossible they should lose them. The rational hope of salvation is founded on a consciousness of an habitual course of piety and virtue. The hope of acceptance through Jesus Christ may increase in strength, in proportion to the progress made in the path towards Christian perfection; and if at the close of life men can with truth affirm, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,"† then are they entitled to that full assurance of hope, which above is declared to be the portion of those

* 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

† 2 Cor. i. 12.

who continue in the Christian course to the close of life. But the snares and corruptions of the world are many and great, and human resolutions are weak. Who, then, among the disciples of Jesus Christ, will dare solemnly to aver, There is no danger that I shall essentially fail in my duty as a candidate for immortality : I am absolutely sure of salvation. This bold declaration must shock every serious mind. The first consequence of it is, that the future sins which this man may commit are not strictly his ; and the next, that Christian liberty is to sin with impunity. The hope which the gospel warrants, as we have repeatedly observed, is founded on a consciousness of a sincere and habitual endeavour to comply with the terms of salvation. " And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he, (God) is pure."* The hope of eternal life, thus founded, is the best support of man through all worldly vicissitudes : it will lighten the pressure of worldly adversity ; increase the enjoyment of every present blessing ; and ever prove a powerful motive to the cultivation and exercise of Christian virtues. If we were destitute of the hope of the gospel, the present life would often be felt as a burden, and immortality contemplated with dreadful apprehension. But Christian hope removes all objections which can be raised against the present condition of man. It sustains the pious and good, under the conflict of death, and illuminates before them the path to the world of spirits.

Christians should guard against despondency as well as presumption. " There is joy in believing."

* 1 John iii. 3.

Persons of undoubted sincerity are sometimes subjected to distressing fears, because they are not conscious of having experienced religious exercises similar to those of their brethren, whom they deem to be Christians of exalted piety. But all who realize the efficacy of religion upon their tempers and lives, may confide in the divine promise of acceptance through Jesus Christ, and may "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

CONCLUSION.

Though it be granted that the ministration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, under the influences of the Divine Spirit, produces its effects in a gradual manner, and that men slowly acquire the qualifications of the Christian character, yet it may be asked, is there not a given point of improvement at which they are fitted for the society of heaven, and, therefore, an instant of time at which they are converted? Suppose there is—who has any interest in the question? None but the man who means to push his religious assiduities till he shall rise to the lowest degree of goodness which will be accepted, and there stop. Little encouragement can be given to this lukewarm disciple. Though there may be a particular degree of Christian attainment necessary to the acceptance of every individual disciple of Jesus Christ, yet this degree cannot be fixed by any general principle; because individuals are under obligations of intellectual and moral improvement, in proportion to their natural talents and local advantages. Their acquisitions in Christian life must

be proportionate to the means afforded them. The inquiry respecting the particular moment at which the Christian improvements of an individual qualify him for heaven, is like the question, At what point of time does the night close, and the day begin ? or, In the progress of human life, at what moment does an individual cease to be a youth, and become a man ?

May God grant us the spirit of truth, to lead us into all truth pertaining to life eternal. May we be found of our Judge in peace, without spot and blameless ; and may an entrance be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXI.

ON THE PERSEVERANCE OF SAINTS.

HEBREWS x. 38.

Now the just shall live by faith : but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

THE last article in the Calvinistick confession of faith is the subject of our review this morning, viz.—

5. “Those whom God has effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, shall never finally fall from a state of grace.”

This position in theology might be opposed by general arguments, drawn from the accountable character of man, and from his sphere of action.

Man is the subject of moral government : the present life is appointed as the period of his moral education : one part of human life is as much probationary as another ; and at its close, the religious character of man will be determined, and sentence pronounced on him according to his works. The promise of acceptance is made only to those who

persevere in the ways of Christian piety, virtue, and charity, to the close of their probation. 'In no period' of the present life then does a man make those Christian attainments, which raise him above the danger of falling into a fatal course of sin.

But the doctrine we are considering rests wholly on scriptural authority. I shall therefore,

1. Review those passages of scripture which are the most frequently adduced as proof of the perseverance of saints.

2. Examine those texts, that are thought to prove that Christians may and have fatally fallen into a course of habitual sin.

3. Consider several of those exhortations of the sacred writers, which warn saints of the danger of a fatal miscarriage, and animate them to steadfastness and constancy.

1. To review those passages of scripture, which are the most frequently adduced as proof of the perseverance of saints.

Many passages of scripture are mentioned, which are supposed to promise to the disciples of Jesus Christ persevering grace. Several of these are found in the gospel of John. "Whosoever drinketh of the water I shall give him, shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."* This is figurative language ; and the obvious meaning of it is, that the instruction and assistance which Jesus Christ grants to his disciples, are sufficient to enlighten the honest mind in all religious truth necessary for salvation, and to guide the

* John iv. 14.

sincere and diligent disciple in the path of peace and joy to the gate of heaven. Another passage from the same gospel follows :—" This is the Father's will, who hath sent me, that of all which he has given me, I should lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day."* The assurance here given is not, that no disciple shall fall away ; but that no diligent and persevering disciple shall fail of his heavenly reward. Assuredly he will not. Christ will certainly raise all his faithful followers from the silence of the tomb to immortal life. John has recorded the following observations of our Saviour—" My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me ; and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all ; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hands." They who are worthily denominated the sheep of Christ, are persons of a meek, peaceable, and heavenly temper. God has committed all who cherish and maintain this disposition to the safe keeping of our Saviour. He, being above thrones, principalities and powers, will not suffer them to perish in the grave ; but will give them life eternal. Our Saviour also in this gospel gives thanks to God for the preservation of his disciples.—" Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition."† The best commentators apply this passage to the preservation of

* John vi. 39.

† xvii. 12.

the lives of the twelve apostles ; but if it be referred to Christians generally, it makes directly against the doctrine of perseverance ; for our Saviour expressly includes Judas in the number given to him ; and he fell away and was lost.

The advocates of the doctrine of perseverance bring passages in which the apostles express the highest persuasion of their own perseverance, and of that of their fellow saints. Thus from St. Paul—“ I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The amount of this animated paragraph is a strong persuasion, that neither the dangers of persecution, the conflicts of the world, nor the temptations of evil beings, would separate the apostle or his fellow disciples from love and obedience to God, and thereby deprive them of the blessings of the love of God in Christ Jesus. In the previous context, St. Paul asks—“ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ?” The exhortation of St. Jude may be considered as a comment on the above sentence from St. Paul—“ Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”† A passage from the epistle to the Philippians is cited in support of the doctrine of perseverance.—“ Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

† Jude 21.

in you, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.”* God works within men to will and to do of his good pleasure, that they may work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. And in the succeeding verse, the apostle expresses his confidence that his Philippian converts would in such a manner co-operate with the divine measures adopted for their salvation, as to render them effectual.—“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart.” To the purpose mentioned, the words of the apostle Peter are adduced—“Who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.”† In the previous context this apostle observes, that God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, has begotten Christians to the hope of immortality; in the verse quoted, he declares, that Christians are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. The condition then is, that men remain in the faith; and on this condition alone, are they entitled to the promise.

It is affirmed that various passages of the New Testament directly assert the perseverance of saints. Such is the declaration of our Saviour—“There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”‡ By the elect, in this place, are meant those who believe in the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and who with sincerity obey his commands. The expression, “If it were possible,” implies not an impossibility, but a high degree of improbability.

* Phil. i. 6.

† 1 Pet. i. 5.

‡ Matt. xxiv. 24.

ty. It expresses the great difficulty with which a purpose can be accomplished. The meaning of our Saviour in this place may be known, from a view of other places in scripture where the same phraseology is used. We are told, that St. Paul hasted, if it were possible for him to be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. There was not an impossibility of this; but the accomplishment of his design would be attended with difficulty.—“If it be possible,” exhorts the apostle, “as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” The words of our Saviour amount to this declaration: They who are grounded and settled in their religion are with difficulty led to apostacy. That they imply not an impossibility that Christians should apostatize, is evident, from the caution which he gives to his disciples to be on their guard, lest they should be led astray by the seducing artifices of false Christs and false prophets.—“Take heed that no man deceive you,”* He solemnly warns them.—“Take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.”† He directs them to watch and pray, that they might be counted worthy to escape those evils. He expressly says, that “because of these things, the love of many shall wax cold.” But he promises, that “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”‡

I will introduce one passage more, which is brought in proof of the doctrine of perseverance. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin,

* Matt. xxiv. 4. † Mark xiii. 23. ‡ Matt. xxiv. 13.

because he is born of God.”* St. John condemns a most corrupt maxim introduced in his day. A sect was thus early formed, which pretended that the Christian was raised above the contagion and impurity of sin ; and although he should commit the grossest acts of sensuality, and live in the licentious indulgence of every passion and appetite of human nature, yet his mind would not thereby be contaminated. These are merely the actions of the flesh, by which the minds of Christians are not rendered impure ; nor do they hereby forfeit the Christian character ; but, though they live as the wicked man liveth, yet they may expect to be admitted to the rewards of heaven. The apostle shows the absurdity and the wickedness of this maxim, and declares, that the child of God, who on consistent grounds entertains the hope of eternal life, must purify himself.—“ Little children, let no man deceive you : he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil : whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.”† The declaration of St. John is not that the Christian cannot fall into fatal sins ; but that he cannot habitually sin, and remain the child of God. Christian principles to be effec-

* 1 John iii. 9.

† 1 John iii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

tual, must purify the heart, and regulate the life ; and the man who habitually allows himself in the wilful commission of any sin, or in the habitual omission of any known duty, ceases to be the child of God, and forfeits the hope of eternal life. The apostle establishes a criterion by which we may test the Christian characters of men.—“He that doeth righteousness is righteous. Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.”

The comments we have made show that the above passages comport with the apparent sense of those which we are now to introduce, and which speak of the apostacy of saints.

The prophet Ezekiel pronounces the condemnation of the man who, having been righteous, falls into a wilful and habitual course of wickedness. “When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.”* Language cannot make any position more clear, than the prophet here states the supposable apostacy of the righteous. That the condition from which he may fall is that attainment in goodness which renders a man acceptable to God, is evident from the converse of the proposition, which the prophet gives us. “If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not

* Ezekiel xviii. 24.

die.”* If the righteous fall from this acceptable state of goodness into habitual wickedness, and do all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, he shall not live, but die. The righteous and the wicked here change their characters and their conditions. The sinner becomes a righteous man, and the righteous man becomes a sinner. The sinner is fitted to receive the rewards of righteousness, and the righteous man becomes a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction.

Our Saviour himself, speaking of peculiar trials, says, “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”† There is no discrimination here made, as it respects principle, in the love of the disciple who falls, and of him who abideth. The language is not, that, in the time of trial, the hypocrite shall be made manifest; but that, under the pressure of persecution, the real attachment of some converts shall fail; and that those who sustain the conflict, and maintain their affection, shall be rewarded. Jesus also declares, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”‡ In the previous context, Jesus represents himself as the vine, and his disciples as the branches. In the verse quoted, he declares, that if any abide not in him, they become withered branches, fit only to be burned. The obvious meaning of this figure is, that individuals may be in him, the vine, and partake of its sap and nourishment, and afterwards be separat-

* Ezekiel xviii. 21.

† Matth. xxiv. 12, 13.

‡ John xv. 6.

ed and wither. In plain language, that, at one time, a man may possess the qualifications of the Christian character, and afterwards lose them, and perish.

St. Paul thus admonishes Christians—"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."* "It is evident that the apostle in these words intended principally, if not only, a final falling away into a state of perdition; for in the preceding part of the chapter, he had recited many examples of sinners whom God had cut off in and for their hardened impenitence, whose fall was certainly final. And having declared that these things happened to them for examples, to be applied by us for our admonition, he immediately infers—*Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall*; that is, in all construction, thus finally fall as they did." In this admonition all Christians are concerned.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews observes—"It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."† The English translators have made the falling away of these characters hypothetick, "if they should fall away." In the original Greek, the language is categorical, "it is impossible to renew these characters, when they fall away."‡ The true construction of the passage is

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

† Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6, 7.

‡ See Macknight on the passage.

this : It is impossible to renew to repentance those who have been enlightened, &c. and have fallen away. It will not be denied that the persons here described were once really Christians. They had been enlightened by the knowledge of the gospel ; by it they had been liberated from the yoke of the Jews, and the superstition of the Gentiles ; they had received those extraordinary gifts which were bestowed on primitive converts ; and they had realized the efficacy of the Christian dispensation in reforming sinners. That their falling is absolute, is evident from the closing expressions—"They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." The impossibility of renewing these characters to repentance should be taken in connexion with the moral nature of man. They have acted in opposition to the highest instruction with which men, as the subjects of a moral government, are favoured, and resisted the most influential motives which can be presented to the human mind ; and therefore, speaking of the ordinary means of reclaiming sinners, it is impossible to bring them to repentance.

Our text militates directly with the doctrine of perseverance.—"The just shall live by faith ; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." While Christians retain their faith, they shall live ; but if any fall away from the Christian faith, profession, and practice, God will not accept them.

Let us now attend to several exhortations of the sacred writers, which warn Christians of the danger

of fatal miscarriage in religion, and animate them to steadfastness and constancy.

The Christian life is in the New Testament compared to a state of warfare, to a race, and other worldly conflicts. These similitudes suppose strife and contention and uncertainty. If the perseverance of saints be absolutely sure, how do the apostles apply to the disciples of their Divine Master these figures of speech? We must fight the Christian battle, in the hope of being crowned with the wreath of victory over our spiritual enemies; but our contention has no connexion with this victory; for we were in possession of it before the warfare commenced. We must run the Christian race, in view of the glorious prize promised to the successful candidate; but our successful efforts are not the condition of obtaining the prize; of this we were insured before we entered the lists. In the epistles, we find the most pungent admonitions to the professors of the gospel to guard against the assaults of their adversaries, lest they should eventually be overcome, and lose their reward. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the

breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”* Can any one mistake the import of this very animated exhortation ? It is clearly this :—My fellow Christians, summon to your aid the many advantages granted by the Author of our religion, that you may be enabled to repel the assaults of the enemies of goodness, resist the temptations of the world, and surmount the obstructions which impede your course in the Christian path ; and that you may faithfully perform the duties required by the Captain of your Salvation. Taking to yourselves these aids, devoutly ask assistance of God, and cautiously and resolutely proceed in the Christian course to the end of life. Does this admonition consist with the supposition of absolute perseverance ? Then the language of the converted man, acting in accordance with the advice of St Paul, may be this :—Having experienced the renovating influences of the Divine Spirit, my title to heaven is sure ; but the apostle exhorts me to take to myself the whole armour of God, that I may be enabled to stand in the evil day, and repel the assault of the adversaries of my salvation. I must pray always with all perseverance, lest the powers of darkness should lead me astray, and Satan ensnare me to the destruction of my soul.

* Eph. vi. 10—12.

Besides these more extended exhortations, the inspired writers frequently in a pointed manner, admonish professors to constant vigilance, and to unwearied exertion, that they may sustain their characters ; and the promises of acceptance and reward are limited to those who persevere in the Christian path to the end of their probation.—“ Whose house we are, (Christ’s) if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” “ Let us hold fast our profession.” “ Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”* “ If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”† “ Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.”‡ “ Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”§ It will be remarked that, in these passages, the exhortation is not, that men acquire new qualifications, but retain those which they already possess ; not that they strive to become the true disciples of Jesus Christ, but maintain vigilance that they may not fall from a station to which they have already attained, and thereby cease to be real Christians.

Learning the real nature of a probationary state, and acquiring the knowledge of the conditions of divine acceptance, let none of us, my Christian brethren, rest satisfied with first principles. As we know how we ought to walk and please God, may we abound more and more.

* Heb. iii. 6 ; iv. 14 ; x. 23.

† Col. i. 23.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 17.

§ Rev. ii. 10.

SERMON XXII.

ON HERESY.

TITUS iii. 10, 11.

A man that is an heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject ; knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

I SHALL treat our subject in the following manner, viz.—

1. Show the scriptural meaning of the term heresy.

2. Describe the character of the persons, on whom Christ and his apostles direct ecclesiastical censures to be inflicted.

3. State the meaning of heresy in ecclesiastical history.

4. Point out the evil consequences which result from the establishment of human creeds as tests of orthodoxy.

1. The scriptural meaning of the term heresy.

The literal meaning of heresy, in the original, is choice. Among different persuasions, an individual

makes his election. The writers of the New Testament more generally use this word to express a religious sect; and in many instances they do not determine whether the tenets of the sect be founded in truth or error. (Acts v. 17.) "The high priest rose up, and they that were with him, which is the sect (heresy) of the Pharisees." (Acts xv. 5.)—"There rose up certain of the sect (heresy) of the Pharisees." The orator Tertullus brought this charge against St. Paul. (Acts ii. 4, 5.) "We have found this man, a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world; and a ringleader of the sect (heresy) of the Nazarenes." Paul, in his answer, acknowledged that, after the way they called heresy, he worshipped the God of his fathers. Paul also declared, (Acts xxvi. 5.) that, "after the strictest sect (heresy) of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." In all these places, the original word is the same. In most of the passages, the word does not imply criminality in those to whom it refers. St. Paul, where he uses it, is commending his practices. The Jews, who were the inhabitants of Rome, said to Paul, (Acts xxviii. 22.) "We desire to hear thee, what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect, (heresy) we know that it is every where spoken against."—"There must also," says St. Paul, (1 Cor. xi. 19.) "be heresies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest." The different tempers, situations, and pursuits of men considered, difference in religious opinions among them must be expected; and their divisions afford opportunity to test the integrity, the resolution, and

constancy of the ingenuous friend of truth. Heresy, in all the above passages, means a sect, a particular religious denomination.

When the sacred writers reprehend heresy as a crime, we find some immorality associated with it, on which the censure is founded. The criminal heretick is the man who chooses his sect from selfish and wicked motives, that he may gain a dominating influence, secure some worldly emolument, or obtain some sensual gratification. St. Paul, in our text, directs Titus, "A man that is a heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject." The apostle here clearly describes the character of a factious and vicious member of the Christian society, who, being conscious that he had departed from the path of truth and rectitude, must himself approve the sentence of exclusion. In the previous context, St. Paul recommends to Christians a life and conversation becoming their profession, and exhorts them to avoid foolish questions and contentions, which are unprofitable and vain. He then describes the heretick, whom Titus, after due admonition, must reject—"Knowing that he who is such is subverted, and sinneth; being condemned of himself." The error here reprehended is not of the head but of the heart; not of the judgment, but of the conscience; not of opinion, but of practice.

The apostle Paul classes criminal heresy with the most gross immoralities. (Gal. v. 19.)—"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, emulations, wrath, strife, sedi-

tions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.”

Criminal hereticks St. Peter marks in strong lines. (2 Peter ii. 1.)—“But there are false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” The apostle here delineates a depraved character.

A man may associate himself with a sect of Christians, and become, in the scriptural sense, a heretick ; and yet, in him, heresy be innocent, yea, commendable. He deliberately joins this denomination not to subserve bad purposes, or to gratify evil propensities ; but to oppose corruptions and abuses, to appear as the advocate of Christian truth and liberty ; and his heart not condemning him, he may have confidence towards God.

From a full view of the subject, it is evident that heresy was not originally a term of criminal import : it meant simply the choice of religious opinions. Different systems of religion are presented to the mind, and it chooses between them. This choice does not necessarily imply guilt. The mind cannot be employed on a subject more important ; and when a man is convinced that a particular sect is formed on principles the best calculated to promote the interests of truth, godliness, and charity, he is under sacred obligations to join it. In doing this, he may become an heretick, but he does not become criminal. Heresy, in the New Testament, is considered criminal only when

it is connected with a factious spirit, and leads to unchristian strife and unnecessary separations.

2. To describe the character of the persons on whom Christ and his apostles direct ecclesiastical censures to be inflicted.

The gospel does not, I believe, authorize a Christian church to inflict censure on their members merely for their opinions. The gospel, in its spirit and laws, is tender of the consciences of men, and secures to its disciples the right of private judgment. What, then, is the character of those who are made the subjects of ecclesiastical censure? Our Saviour has stated (Matt. xviii.) the cause, the several steps, and the issue of Church discipline. The ground of complaint here is not erroneous opinion, but immoral practice.—“If thy brother offend thee, tell him his fault.” Opinions which are the result of honest inquiry after truth, ought not to be an offence to a Christian brother, nor can they with propriety be denominated a fault. But no one, I presume, will appeal to the directions of our Saviour, in this place, as a particular authority for making errors in opinion the ground of censure. I therefore proceed to a review of other passages. Our text is often quoted to this point.—“A man that is an heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he who is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” This description does not apply to the man who honestly seeks the truth, and candidly communicates his opinions, though these may be erroneous. It is not a mistake of judgment which

exposes an individual, on this authority, to expulsion from the Church, but immoral practices.— This heretick was not a man, who, having embraced erroneous opinions, needed to be instructed ; but one, who, having wilfully perverted Christian principles, was the proper object of solemn admonition. Titus was not directed to convince him of error, by argument, and to draw him into the path of truth by persuasion ; but to rebuke him for a wilful offence, and if he were found incorrigible to eject him from Christian fellowship.

Peter predicts the advent of false teachers, who would privily introduce “ damnable heresies, denying the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” This language does not comport with the character of the man who honestly studies the bible as the rule of faith and duty, and admits its truths as far as he understands them. This man may adopt great errors, but these cannot be, in the sense of the apostle, damnable heresies.

The phraseology of St. Peter does not comport with opinions which consist with purity of life and conversation. Peruse the whole chapter, and you will be convinced that the apostle, by damnable heresies in this passage, means sins, which the most depraved mind only can commit. The characters placed before our view are apostates from the Christian faith, or men who had perverted Christian principles to subserve the basest purposes. They denied the Lord : on account of their pernicious practices, the way of truth was evil spoken of : through covetousness, they made merchandize of

the souls of men. They had eyes full of adultery, and could not cease from sin : they were beguiling, unstable souls : they were cursed children. The beings with whom these men are compared, and with whose punishments they are threatened, designate their characters, and define their damnable heresies. They resemble the fallen angels, the antediluvian race, the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrha ; and on them the condemnation of those abandoned beings is denounced.

Under this branch of our subject, I will direct your attention to a passage in the Revelation of St. John, which is adduced as authority for inflicting publick censure on a professor who is supposed to hold doctrinal errors. (ii. 14—16.) The Church of Pergamos is thus addressed—"I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Was the doctrine of Balaam speculative error, or a principle of lewdness and corruption adopted as artful policy ? "So hast thou also them that hold this doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." The particular offence of this sect, we are told, was a community of wives. The Nicolaitans corrupted Christianity at its source, and embodied immortality in the substance of our religion, that it might give a sanction to those works of the flesh which hurt men's souls. What relation then is there between the doctrine of this sect, and the speculative opinions of him who walketh as becometh the gospel ?

If the passages of scripture already reviewed, do not empower churches to discipline their members

for supposed errors in opinion, none, I think, can be found which will.

You will not, my Christian brethren, suppose that I deem it indifferent what religious opinions men embrace. The diligent inquiry after truth is the sacred duty of all accountable beings. Our religious opinions are intimately associated with the temper of our minds and the course of our lives. If we do not improve the means we possess to acquire right views of Christian doctrines, we may form those inveterate prejudices, which will close our minds against the light of instruction, and render us unable to judge of the evidence, or to appreciate the worth of truth; and we may violate the first principles of our religion, while we suppose we are promoting its highest purposes. If we be not settled and grounded in religious opinions, we may be carried about by every wind of doctrine: in principle, we shall be exposed to the confusion which attends ignorance; and in practice, to many of the evils which accompany intentional error.

5. To state the meaning of heresy in ecclesiastical history.

Ecclesiastical heresy is opposition to the opinions of the predominant sect in any country. Soon after the Roman empire became Christian, an use was made of the term, very different from its original import; but the word then bore no determinate meaning. They, who usurped dominion in the church, made the term heresy an engine to aid them in their efforts to maintain their despotism. Heresy and orthodoxy were defined by the ruling power of the day: the orthodox man of one period was the

heretick of another. For example, there was a long and violent struggle for superiority between Trinitarians and Arians. These sects alternately acquired predominance, and alternately deposed and banished bishops and inferior presbyters as hereticks. When the struggle for domination in the church in a degree ended, and a particular denomination was invested with the ruling power, then human confessions and articles of faith were permanently established, and all opinions opposed to the publick test of orthodoxy were stamped with the impression of heresy. Ecclesiastical courts then arraigned men for their thoughts, and punished them for speculative opinions. The love of truth, the diligent study of the bible, the sincere worship of God, according to the dictates of an enlightened conscience, if it led professors aside from the prescribed forms, exposed them to fines and imprisonment, to stripes, and to the stake; in a word, to the severest punishments that ever were inflicted on the most atrocious felon. The highest characters, emperors, and pontiffs, assembled around the fires, which were lighted to burn hereticks.

During the long interval between the Council of Nice in the fourth century, and that of Trent in the sixteenth, at least in the western empire, professed Christians formed their religious opinions, not from the scriptures, but from the dogmas of the church; and it is well known, that the least deviation from the prescribed rule of faith, or the established form of worship, exposed a member of the Christian community to the loss of property and reputation, of liberty and life. Nor were men much better situat-

ed in the English church. The name of the master was changed, but the spiritual tyranny was continued under the houses of the Tudors and the Stuarts. The same servile submission to ecclesiastical authority, the same blind reception of the prescribed articles and established formularies, were required, which the Romish Hierarchy demanded from all; and non-conformity was punished with similar pains and penalties, though not with equal sacrifice of human life. At the revolution under William and Mary, an act of toleration was passed; and dissenters from the establishment have since been protected in the quiet exercise of the rights of conscience, on the condition that they pay tithes to the national church, and submit to be deprived of some important rights of citizens.

In our happy country, different denominations of Christians are not merely tolerated—they are placed in a state of perfect equality. Every man in his religion is free, and may without molestation worship his God according to the dictates of his conscience. But where the sword of persecution is arrested in the hands of the religious bigot, it often happens, that the odium of heresy is retained, and the frightful name of heretick is used as a powerful instrument to subserve the purposes of a party. When the great body of a nation adopt the same system of Christian doctrine, the prevalent sect too often manifest a disposition to disturb those who are opposed to their scheme of speculation in the exercise of the rights of private judgment. They endeavour to control the sentiments of all around them, and to check, by the force of publick opinion, inquiries

which may militate with their peculiar system, and to deprive the individual of his living, his reputation and influence, who dares to bring their favourite doctrines to the test of reason and scripture. No measure has been found more effectual to accomplish this design than the cry of heresy. When a man is once denominated a heretick, he is by many considered as a fair object of abuse. The desertion of his former friends is justified. To excite the fears of the timid, and to rouse the apprehensions of the serious against him, is deemed an act of piety. He may by his works display a mind highly cultivated, and in practice give an exemplification of all Christian graces, yet it will be denied that he possesses either the spirit or the principles of the gospel ; and it will be considered as meritorious to render his best labours useless, and to make his life miserable.

4. To point out the evil consequences which result from the establishment of human creeds as the test of orthodoxy.

Christ, the only legislator in the church, has made his gospel the sufficient rule of faith and practice to all his disciples. When his direction is disregarded, and human creeds are substituted in the place of scripture, strife, domination, and schism are the consequences. The prevention of error and heresy has always been the pretext for the introduction of human creeds ; but in fact, creed-makers have at different periods introduced all manner of errors and absurdities into the church ; and where creeds become a part of a national establishment, they perpetuate the errors they introduce. Human tests

are never favourable to the impartial study of truth ; but they always occasion bitterness and uncharitableness among brethren. The attempt to secure union and good fellowship in the Christian community under tests made and enforced by human authority, has every where failed ; and it is time to seek harmony and love among Christians by other means. Shall not experience make the Christian world wiser ? Every discerning mind, that will diligently examine the subject, must be convinced that the Christian community has suffered more from the attempt to erect human formularies as the standard of orthodoxy, than from the combined efforts of all the enemies of our religion. In view of these evils, shall the Christian world persist with the same zeal to support human impositions, and to denounce the same anathemas against all dissenters ? If they do, similar causes will continue to produce similar effects.

Consider for a moment the pernicious influence which the subscription to human articles of faith must have on the clergy of a national establishment. The ministers of the altar are under much greater restraint in the study of scripture, than the people to whom they preach. They must profess and preach such doctrines as their church has pronounced orthodox : they must maintain the opinions which maintain them in their offices. Reasoning from common principles of human nature, can men, thus bound and shackled, study the sacred oracles with an unbiassed judgment, and preach in its purity and simplicity the truths of the gospel ? Where there is no national establishment, if a particular

system of doctrine be by general consent denominated orthodox, and the Christian character be denied to those who dissent from it, what encouragement has a minister diligently to study the scriptures? What security has the preacher, that a diligent study of the bible will not lead to a view of Christian doctrine opposed to prevalent opinions, and constrain him to adopt a method of preaching, which will expose him to the loss of his good name, his living, and his influence? His sure course is to shut his bible, and take the system of an orthodox divine as the rule of his faith, and as an authority for the doctrines which he preaches.

In conclusion.

The articles of Christian faith among primitive professors were few in number, and plain and perspicuous in their nature. Christians then did not make divisions on account of difference of opinion in things not plainly revealed; but they were knit together in love; and the brother who was weak in faith they received, but not to doubtful disputation. Disputes and divisions in the Christian church have not been made about essential truths, but respecting articles on which wise and good men may differ, and which all Christians should hold with mutual forbearance and charity, maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. If the disciples of Jesus possess the spirit of their Master, they will agree in opinion as far as is necessary for united endeavours to promote the great design of their religion. With this spirit, they may unitedly co-operate with God and with Christ, with apostles and evangelists in promoting the kingdom of righteous-

ness, peace, and joy. The scripture, not the traditions of men, is the rule of protestants. Let us act consistently with our principle—drop the shibboleth of party—encourage the diligent study of the bible—allow to all the right of private judgment—permit men, without the hazard of their reputation or standing in society, to declare the result of their faithful inquiries ; and neverwithhold our charity or our communion from those, who, by the temper of their minds, and the course of their lives, give evidence that they seek the truth in the love of it, and sincerely endeavour to do the will of God as far as they know it.

If different denominations of Christians would introduce the harmony and love of primitive times, they must drop the recriminating names, and cease from the interchange of those censures and condemnations, which the vain and angry disputes in the church have introduced, and which have become too common. Let us love as brethren, and may the God of peace dwell with, and bless us.

SERMON XXIII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY.

Delivered on Christmas Day.

HOSEA xiii. 14.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave : I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plague. O grave, I will be thy destruction.

THE human mind is prone to pass from one extreme to its opposite. This observation may be illustrated from the history of the Christian community. The Roman Catholick church carried ceremonial observances in religious worship to extreme abuse. They canonized numerous saints, and appointed so many days to be religiously observed in honour of their memory, as greatly to interfere with the important business of society. Like the Pharisees of old, the rulers of this church, in its corrupt age, made religion essentially to consist in the superstitious observance of external forms ; and publick worship with them degenerated into a splendid but lifeless ceremonial service.

When the English church threw off the yoke of Popery, their rulers, in the opinion of many discerning and pious men, retained too many of the forms of the ecclesiastical establishment from which they separated. The ceremonies which they did preserve, were certainly enforced by measures which in their operation infringed the rights of private judgment, and violated the humane spirit of their religion.

Our ancestors, who fled from this imposition on conscience, associated with their disaffection to the dominating temper and the abusive practices of that hierarchy, a dislike to nearly all the circumstances common to its publick services. Every instrument of musick was excluded from houses of religious worship ; and a form of ecclesiastical government and religious service was adopted, the best suited, perhaps, to the infant state of the colony, but not fitted for a great and independent nation in a state of improved society.

CHRISTMAS was pre-eminently distinguished among the holy days of the Romish and the English church ; and the general opposition of our forefathers to their superstitions and abuses was extended to this festival. They, through several succeeding generations, refused to join in the religious offices of this anniversary.

We, their favoured descendants, fondly cherish the highest veneration for their memories : we dwell with delight on their love of civil and religious liberty—on their piety and patriotism : our hearts are warmed by grateful recollections as often as we review the invaluable institutions which they

have transmitted to us ; and at the same time we rejoice that we are liberated from the prejudices which their situation rendered unavoidable. Not feeling the pressure of that iron hand which bore heavily on them, we can calmly separate accidental circumstances from essential principles. With higher means of instruction, we can consistently drop the weak and indifferent appendages of their system, while we sacredly adhere to its sound and vital parts.

In respect to ceremonial observances, a more liberal spirit now prevails through our country. In many of our religious societies organs have been introduced in church musick ; and in most of them other instruments are now used without giving offence. While, in the progress of society, all other institutions have their appropriate ornaments, many think, that if social worship be left without decoration, it will be destitute of those external attractions, which to a large portion of mankind are beneficial, if not necessary ; and they imagine that embellishment may be introduced, without corrupting the spirituality, or lessening the moral influence of public worship.

Situated as we are, may we not, without unreasonable bias, determine the degree of estimation in which Christmas services ought to be holden by a Christian community ? The New-Testament has not appointed anniversary services in commemoration of the birth of our Saviour. If we celebrate this event, we should consider it as a privilege with which we are indulged, not as a duty divinely enjoined. This celebration is not by divine authority appointed ; it

is not by divine authority forbidden. Its expediency should be determined by its probable effects. We publickly commemorate the anniversary of our national independence: we publickly honour the memories of the benefactors of our country. Is it not then proper, that we should celebrate the advent of Immanuel into our world? Is any other event great in comparison with this? Has any other being appeared among men to whom we are under obligations of gratitude, when compared with him?

Should any object to the time of this celebration, on the plea, that we have not conclusive proof respecting the particular day on which our Saviour was born—our answer is, the objection on the point before us has no force. Christ the Saviour was born into our world: whether we celebrate his appearance on the precise day of his birth, or on some other, to a religious purpose is a circumstance of no importance. The Christian community in general entertain the same opinion respecting the time; if the event be publickly noticed, it is convenient, and therefore desirable, that there should be uniformity in the day of celebration.

The useful purposes contemplated by the religious observances of the season are these: to direct our serious attention to the great salvation, which Jesus Christ published to a sinful world; to excite in us suitable returns of gratitude for the inestimable privileges we possess as his disciples; to animate us to sustain with firmness and constancy the Christian profession; to inspire us with diligence in the cultivation of the Christian graces and virtues;

and to insure our perseverance in the path towards Christian perfection.

Though the sublime declarations of our text be considered as having a primary reference to the nation of Israel, yet, in their general sense, they may without violence be taken as expressive of the great doctrine of immortality, which Jesus Christ came into our world to establish and proclaim. In this doctrine we all have the deepest interest. Admit, that existence of endless duration, and of unchangeable happiness, is attainable by us, and all worldly objects lose their comparative worth. Admit, that the Christian path leads to the realms of glory, honour, and immortality, and motives to Christian piety and virtue are presented to the human mind, which all the temptations to the unlawful pursuits and to the inordinate indulgences of the world cannot weaken. Can we then, my Christian brethren, better improve the season, than in contemplating our title to eternal life by the promise of the gospel? We then shall be excited to religious gratitude to him, who died that we might live forever; we shall form a resolution strenuously to exert ourselves to acquire the qualifications of the disciple of the Prince of Life; and shall, by the blessing of God, become prepared to pass on in the way of salvation with joy and gladness.

I shall

1. Review, in a cursory manner, the history of the doctrine of immortality among the nations of the earth, before the birth of our Saviour.

2. Attend to the information of the gospel on this important subject.

3. Consider the influence which the instruction and the promises of the gospel ought to have on our dispositions and conduct.

1. To review the history of the doctrine of immortality among the nations of the earth, before the birth of our Saviour.

The expectation of a future state of existence has been common to men in every age of the world. Nations the most ignorant and barbarous discover this persuasion. Men, who appear to have bounded their inquiries by the simple wants of animal existence, express their belief of life beyond the grave. Whether these apprehensions naturally result from religious principles interwoven into the human constitution, and which cause men, without the aid of revelation or philosophy, to rise superior to the threatening appearances of death, and to embrace the hope of immortality; or, whether these are traditional notions, transmitted from the early age of the world, and which had their origin in divine communication, is not easy to determine. The unquestionable fact is, that men, in situations the most unfavourable for religious inquiries, have entertained the expectation of existence after death. Though they believe the human body to be corruptible; though they are the witnesses of the death of their friends, and see their bodies mingling with the dust—yet they imagine their deceased relations and acquaintances still to exist, and they suppose them existing with the same bodily shape, with the same appetites and passions, which they possessed on earth. Being unacquainted with the higher pleasures of an intellectual and moral nature, the heaven

of the ignorant savage consists in the gratification of animal desires ; and his expected happiness in a future world is merely the completion of his earthly wishes.

The theological systems of those Heathen nations which had made the greatest improvements in science and literature, were not favourable to the acquisition of religious knowledge, or to the cultivation of the moral virtues. These systems contained many principles well calculated to make ignorant men the submissive subjects of civil government, and recommended a round of weak and debasing services, fitted, in the apprehension of a deluded people, to induce the Presiding Divinity propitiously to regard national prosperity and individual safety ; but which possessed little to instruct the inquiring mind respecting the nature of moral government, or to enlighten the man in rational views of futurity, who was anxiously desirous to look behind the curtain of death. A man might scrupulously fulfil every requisition of the established religion of Greece and Rome, and at the same time cherish the worst propensities of the human heart, and habitually indulge himself in the most impure acts of vice. The doctrines respecting futurity, publickly inculcated, were blended with extravagant fables and superstitious rites, and they did not furnish adequate motives to persuade men to discipline their passions, or soberly to govern their lives.

The reasonings of the Heathen philosophers never gave satisfaction on the subject of immortality. The wisest of them laboured for the discovery of proofs to establish this interesting position in theolo-

gy. Their arguments are plausible, and perhaps lay a foundation for the support of a good moral life, and for hope in death ; but the greatest of them express uncertainty on the point, and acknowledge that adequate information can never be obtained, unless it should please God to send a messenger from heaven to publish to the family of man his future intentions respecting them. None of the Heathen sages had any apprehension of the resurrection of the body ; and many of them, in their reasonings on the doctrine of immortality, bewildered themselves with metaphysical distinctions, and darkened the subject by words without knowledge. Perhaps a candid and discerning man would rise from the perusal of all the dissertations composed by the moral philosophers of the old world on the doctrine of immortality, with a mind rather perplexed than enlightened ; with his doubts and fears rather multiplied, than his belief and hope established. This appears to have been the state of the case in the Gentile world on the point before us. The natural reason and conscience of men direct their views to a future life, in which they will receive a reward corresponding with their present actions. Every man, learned and ignorant, perceives the influence of these principles. Moral philosophers stretched their powers to lay a stable foundation for the belief of that future existence of which they had a glimpse, and to acquire adequate views of that condition of being to which they aspired ; but they did not succeed ; they arrived not at a conclusion on which they could rely with certainty or satisfaction. In the vain attempt to define the human soul, and to

explain the mode of its future existence, and the manner of its future exercises, they met with insuperable difficulties, and divided into various sects. Some of them, failing in the endeavour to support a favourite hypothesis by solid arguments, renounced their scheme, and with it the doctrine of immortality, and stifled the natural apprehensions of the human mind as erroneous.

The people of Israel possessed better means of instruction on the sublime doctrine of immortality than the pagan nations around them. They were taught the unity, the holiness, and the universal supremacy of God. They had the fullest evidence of the superintendency of God over the affairs of men. Their history furnished them with examples of an immediate intercourse with the spiritual world ; and the translation of Enoch and Elijah was fitted to raise their views to a higher state of being. I cannot therefore for a moment doubt, that individuals among this people, who were distinguished for their piety, supported themselves, under the trials of the present life, by a belief of a future state of retribution, and died in the hope of a blessed immortality. Nor can I suppose, that the nation generally were destitute of the expectation of a future life. But we know that the Sadducees, not a small sect, totally rejected, even in the time of our Saviour, the doctrine of future existence : they said, “ that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit.” The Mosaic institution was preparatory to that of the gospel. In it the doctrine of immortality was but imperfectly revealed. Future rewards and punishments composed no part of the sanction of the law

of Moses. Indeed some learned and pious Christians are of opinion that the doctrine is not to be found in this dispensation. We cannot with certainty say, that the devout Jews, who believed in a future state, adopted the opinion merely on the authority of their sacred books.

The result of our review then is this. The doctrine of the immortality of man was not established with moral certainty before the appearance of Jesus Christ in our world.

2. Attend to the information of the gospel on this important subject.

Christ has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. Jesus, the Prince of Life, has dispersed the clouds which obscured our prospects of a future state. He has solved the doubts on this subject which perplexed the wisest of men. He has broken down the wall of partition between time and eternity, and presented the heavenly world to our view in all its glories. He has established the doctrine of a future retribution on a foundation that cannot be moved, made it an adequate support of a pious and virtuous life, and the sure ground of hope and joy in death. By his own resurrection he has given an earnest of the future resurrection of his disciples. Then the prophetic declaration of our text will be fully accomplished. "I am he," says our Saviour, "that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive forevermore, and have the keys of death." "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." "The hour is coming, in which all that are in their graves shall hear

the voice of the Son of God, and come forth.” “The sea shall give up the dead that are in it; and death and the grave shall deliver up the dead that are in them.” “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Such is the language of the New Testament on this subject.

Arguments in favour of immortality, drawn from the nature of the human soul, from the attributes of God, from the traces of a moral government visible in the present state, and from every view which can be taken of natural religion, all have their place in the defence of Christianity, and help to make it the more credible. But the information of the gospel on the doctrine of our future existence is most plain and direct. It is adapted to every capacity, and fitted to enlighten every mind. It is information not given as the result of abstract reasoning and logical deduction, but it is given by the Parent of Life, and the moral Governour of the Universe; and he, in his goodness and mercy, has been pleased to confirm our faith in his divine communication, by raising his Son from the grave, whom he commissioned to publish the glad tidings of salvation to a guilty world. The future existence of men is exemplified to human view in the renewed life of the Saviour; and our belief of its reality may rest on a fact capable of proof like other facts—a fact made credible to us by the testimony of plain men, who were witnesses of its reality; and whose testimony is fortified by their general character, by the cheerful sacrifice of worldly interest and of life,

in support of their veracity ; and by every circumstance which has attended the establishment and preservation of Christianity.

The enlightened, the confirmed Christian, cannot doubt his own immortality : he can never entertain fears of annihilation, from the mere contemplation of which our minds recoil with horror.

The more forcibly to show the value of the instruction of the gospel, permit me to place before you, in contrast, the views of a *Heathen* and of a *Christian* philosopher on our subject. We will select, as an example, the moral sage who was a master of all Grecian and Roman learning, who wrote on the nature of God, on moral virtue, and on the immortality of man, and who, in every accomplishment, stood pre-eminent among the great and the wise. Cicero, the ornament and the boast of Rome, observes, that at one time a future state seemed to him to be fully proved ; that at another, all his arguments appeared to vanish, and he was left in doubt. He remarks, that it was in his retired moments, and whilst he devoted himself to deep meditation, that he felt satisfied with the result of his researches, and without reserve admitted the belief of immortality ; and that, as soon as he entered society, other feelings arose, and amidst worldly pursuits the expectation of a future life passed from his mind. Writing to a friend, Cicero expresses himself in the following manner :—“ I do not see, why I may not venture to declare freely to you what my thoughts are concerning death. Perhaps I may discover, better than others, what it is, because I am now, by reason of my age, not far from it. I believe that the

Fathers, those eminent persons, and my particular friends, are still alive, and that they live the life which only deserves the name of life. Nor has reason only and disputation brought me to this belief, but the famous judgment and authority of the chief philosophers. O glorious day ! when I shall go to the council and assembly of spirits ; when I shall go out of this tumult and confusion ; when I shall be gathered to all those brave spirits who have left the world ; and when I shall meet the greatest and best of men. But if, after all, I am mistaken herein, I am pleased with my error, which I would not willingly part with, while I live ; and if, after my death, I shall be deprived of all sense, I have no fear of being imposed upon and laughed at in the other world for this my mistake."

Here the moral philosopher of Rome mentions a future state of being as a probable truth, and as the object of his hope, but not as a doctrine founded on such clear proof as to fix his unshaken faith. Even this probability draws from him an impassioned eulogy on its felicity. But his doubts damp the ardour of his feelings, and he derives security to his hope from the consideration, that if the present life should close human existence, annihilation will free him from ridicule.

St. Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, was also a believer in the doctrine of man's immortality. He entertained the hope of being admitted, at death, not only to the spirits of just men made perfect, but also to the assembly of angels, to the company of his Divine Master, and to the presence of God. But his opinion rested not on that slight evidence which,

though sufficient to charm the imagination under the shade of philosophy, or in the silent hour of meditation, did not furnish a principle to support the mind under the conflicts of the world. The belief of eternal life was so fully established in his mind, as to make it the first object of desire, and the goal to which every exertion was directed. To preach the doctrine of the resurrection and of eternal life, he was ready to sacrifice all worldly enjoyments; and while suffering the heaviest evils incident to the present state of man, he declared, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Paul, also, has left a treatise on death and immortality. In it he expresses neither doubt nor anxiety: he declares the proof of future existence to be complete and satisfactory. So fully was his mind possessed of the expectation of immortal life, that to him it became a present reality: a view of its glories transports his soul; and he breaks forth in songs of joy and triumph—"O! death, where is thy sting? O! grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

3. Consider the influence which the instruction and the promises of the gospel ought to have on our dispositions and conduct.

Whether we consider the object of the instruction and promises of the gospel, or the character of the Being who gave them, we shall perceive the

value of our Christian privileges, and feel our obligation to improve them. The object is a blessed immortality; their author Christ, the Son of God. To the goodness and mercy of God are we indebted for the scheme of our salvation. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. But Christ devoted himself, as Mediator, to the execution of the purposes of divine grace and mercy. The angels of heaven were the heralds of the advent of Immanuel; and, proclaiming his birth, they gave glory to God on high, and published peace and good will to men. In the high concern of our salvation, Jesus appeared in the nature of man, subjected himself to all the wants of humanity, endured the contradiction of sinners, and yielded himself the victim of the cross. Grateful to God for the gift of his Son, grateful to Christ for his voluntary mediation, let us, under the influence of our religion, conform ourselves to the divine image, and imitate the example of the Saviour. God in his goodness has given us an assurance of future life: do we with indifference receive the information? In mercy he has by his own Son promised us endless felicity in a future world, on conditions which prove that he consults our present as well as our immortal happiness: can we be unmoved by the gift?

Respecting the influence which religion ought to have on our tempers and practices, we may take useful lessons even from those whose ignorance and superstition we justly compassionate. The infatu-

ated Pagan, in compliance with the requisitions of his system, with alacrity subjects himself to the severest bodily tortures, and with apparent delight offers his life in sacrifice to his idol deity. The deluded follower of Mahomet never supposes his religious duty performed, till he has made a painful journey to Mecca, and worshipped at the tomb of his prophet. Shall we Christians, then, we who are instructed in all truth pertaining to eternal life, and vindicated into perfect liberty, refuse gratefully to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master? Shall we neglect to observe those gracious directions which are designed to transform us into a likeness of his perfect character, to make us in disposition the most amiable, in practice the most benevolent, and to qualify us for the society of heaven?

May the example of primitive Christians more especially enliven our diligence in the path of piety and virtue, and fortify our minds with resolution to sustain the conflicts of our probationary course. Animated by the hope of the gospel, the apostles of our Lord subjected themselves to all the terrors of persecution, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. The great body of the first converts to our religion gave full evidence of their faith in the promises of the gospel, and clearly manifested that it had a salutary influence on their tempers and lives. These died in the faith, not having received the promises; but seeing them afar off, were persuaded of their reality, embraced them as the objects of their supreme dependence, and in consequence professed themselves strangers

and pilgrims on earth. The motives and assistances, which supported them, are presented to our minds, and our course is free from many of the difficulties and dangers with which theirs was beset. Let us, then, imitate those who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises.

As Christians, we are bound to give a fair exemplification of our religion before the world. As candidates for immortality, it is our first duty and our highest interest to walk worthily of our Christian vocation ; for the salvation of our souls is suspended on the improvement of our privileges as the disciples of Jesus Christ. May our religion in its life dwell in our hearts ; may it in all its beauty and lustre shine in our lives.

In the consciousness of sincerity and diligence in the high concerns of our probation, let us open our minds to the hope and joy to which the Christian character is entitled. Disposed to approach the light of truth, and make it manifest that our deeds are wrought in God, a dependence on the promises of the gospel being in us the principle of Christian life, let not debasing fear enter into our religious services ; but through all worldly vicissitudes, let us rejoice in the Lord, and joy ourselves in the God of our salvation. Not resting satisfied with the things that are seen, but seeking first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, may we with supreme delight consider ourselves as children of God ; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, to an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that will not fade away.

SERMON XXIV.

THE DUTIES ENJOINED BY THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

EXODUS xx. 3, 9, 10, 11.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work; thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

THE ten commandments were introduced as a rule of life to the Israelites, with the highest solemnity. The manifestations of divine majesty and glory made at Sinai are fitted to fill the soul with the reverence of God, and to purify and exalt the piety of man.

God, at this time, was pleased to enter into a covenant with his people. The Israelites sacredly engaged to obey the commands of Heaven, and to do all that the Lord should speak unto them; and the

Divine Sovereign graciously promised on this condition to make them his people, to be their God and the God of their children, and to confer upon them the favours which he beareth to his chosen.

The covenant of grace and mercy, of which Jesus Christ is the Mediator, embraces conditions of divine favour, in which all mankind are interested; and in this the rewards of a future state are more clearly promised, than they were by the dispensation of Moses. Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. God is present with every individual of his rational offspring: he beholds their ways; and all, who obey his commands and resign themselves to his disposal, he will take into his holy keeping, guide by his unerring counsel, and finally admit to the glories of his more immediate presence. Under impressive views of divine superintendence, serious minds are led to inquire—What is the service which the Lord God requireth? When may we feel satisfied that we are safely walking in the path that leads to the favour of God, which is life, and to his loving kindness, which is better than life? The consideration of our text will, I hope, assist you, my Christian brethren, in forming satisfactory answers to these interesting questions.

The fourth commandment embraces two distinct parts of duty: the common employments of the world, and the religious offices of the Sabbath.

1. The employments of the world.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, said God to fallen man. Under the present constitution of things, habitual employment is as necessary to the health of the body and to the vigour of the mind, as it is to the procurement of subsistence. Labour is the price which God has set upon every valuable object. All will allow, that it is the duty of man to be habitually occupied in some honest and useful worldly pursuit. But some fall into great and perhaps fatal mistakes on this subject. They appear entirely to separate the common business of society from religious duties, and to suppose that religion, strictly speaking, cannot be carried into the ordinary employments of life. Though they consider themselves as inhabitants of this world, and as candidates for a future, and acknowledge that in each relation they have important duties to discharge, yet they conceive that these duties are never united. As this world is removed from the future, so they apprehend that the duties of the present life have no tendency to prepare them for the next. Worldly business and religious service they deem to be totally distinct in their nature, and as widely removed from each other as earth is from heaven. In the right execution of worldly labour, and in the right performance of religious duty, they seem to think, that a totally different class of principles and affections is necessarily brought into exercise ; and that *these* principles and affections must be assumed and laid aside with *those* labours and services. Religion being thus separated from the common concerns of life, a thorough acquaintance with the conduct of a man, as it respects his

transactions with the world, will furnish no clue to lead us to the knowledge of his religious character.

This is an error extremely dangerous. Was such our moral state, a man might confine his religion to set times and places ; and he might put it on, and put it off, as he does the garments of his body : he might serve God on the Sabbath, and Mammon through the week : he might be a saint in the temple, and a son of Belial in his family : he might perform pious offices on certain occasions, and in his general intercourse with society ensnare, circumvent, and ruin his fellow-men.

The common labours of the world are the appointment of God. It is our duty to be habitually occupied in them. These we are not unnecessarily to suspend, nor essentially neglect, under a pretence of serving God in a higher manner ; but in our various pursuits we must find our regular employment. When we fulfil the common offices of the week, under a sense of the authority of God, who appointed them, and with a view to his approbation, then in their performance we act religiously—we serve God. This is a part of the duty which is enjoined as the condition of salvation through Jesus Christ. The religious performance of our daily and weekly labours has a direct tendency to form the requisite disposition for the society, and to qualify us for the services of heaven. The world is not only the theatre on which the brightest virtues of our religion are to be displayed, but it is also the place where the disposition for their exercise, that in solitude we cherished, is to be confirmed.

In our intercourse with society we are indeed exposed to many temptations; but Christian virtue is the result of trial; and without this proof of its purity, confidence cannot be reposed in it. The world is the school where our passions and affections are to be disciplined, and the religious principle is to acquire strength. The competitions of business, the interference arising from active pursuits, and even the wilful opposition and unprovoked abuse of those with whom we are associated in the performance of the common labours of life, and the offices of domestick relation, give occasion for exercising and strengthening our patience and forbearance, our clemency and charity. Stated employment, in an honest and useful occupation, secures the benefits of self-possession, leads to a tranquil state of mind, and invigorates the powers and faculties of the human constitution. By these means those intellectual and moral habits are formed, which help to prepare us for the duties and the happiness of a higher condition of being.

But to our observations some may object, that in the common business of society, saints and sinners meet on the same ground, and that between them there is no discrimination. In all the transactions and concerns of the world, the man, who in the judgment of charity does not possess a religious principle, discovers as much skill, manages with as much address, and is as successful, as he who has made the highest Christian attainments. Our Saviour himself supports this position; for he tells us, that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. On experience

we find, that, as it respects all the complicated concerns which fall under the general term of domestic economy, and through the whole circle of secular employments, the management of the man apparently irreligious, is in many instances admirable; and that in worldly care and prudence, he is an example highly worthy of imitation. We grant all this; but it does not weaken our reasoning, nor in any degree invalidate our conclusion. Such characters as we have described are not criminal, because they engage with earnestness in the business of the world, and manage it with discretion and providence. Thus far they are to be justified. They are much more estimable in society than the slothful and the dissipated. For their worldly wisdom and honest industry they receive an appropriate reward, they lay up for themselves treasures on earth; but, not being rich towards God, they will not secure to themselves the durable treasures of heaven. Not carrying a religious principle into the common concerns of life, the moral end of worldly employment will not be answered. They may in their active pursuits quicken their ingenuity, and with increased facility acquire wealth; but they will become sordid in spirit, and will never be made meet for the rest of saints in the kingdom of light. To avoid their fatal error, let us not discard what is really worthy of praise; but, imitating their care, industry and providence, let us introduce a religious principle into the concerns of the world; and, while diligent in business, let us be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Then the pursuits of the

present life will be subservient to the interests of immortality. Then the blessing of the Lord will make us rich, and he will add no sorrow therewith. In this manner sustaining our character as the inhabitants of earth and as candidates for heaven, we shall be prepared for temporal and spiritual blessings.

We may often hear remarks from various persons of the following import: We have not time to be religious. Attention to our worldly business is indispensable, and our time is unremittedly spent in it. How, then, can we attend to religious duties? The importance of particular seasons for the performance of the more appropriate offices of pious meditation and worship, will claim our attention under the second branch of our subject. But the observations already made will enable us to answer the questions which have just been stated. Has Divine Providence placed a man in a situation where his family depend for their daily support on his daily labour, whose hours must be sedulously devoted to his stated employment, that he may procure bread for the wife of his bosom, and the children of his affection? Let not this man suppose, that religion is necessarily excluded from the humble sphere in which he moves. No: his daily labour is his religious duty. He is bound to perform it by the most sacred obligation. If he neglect it, he will, in the language of inspiration, deny the faith, and become worse than an infidel. Let him carry upon his mind a sense of the presiding Deity, and execute the commission of life with a view to the approbation, and in hope of the blessing of God. Let his

religion keep him from discontent and dishonesty ; from murmuring and taking the name of his Maker in vain : let it sustain him under the difficulties he is called to endure, and enable him in patience to possess his soul ; and then God, who appointed his toils, will approve their performance, will lift upon him the light of his countenance, and reserve for him an inheritance in heaven, incorruptible, undefiled, and that will never fade away.

Does the mother of a family make a similar complaint ? Is she ready to exclaim—My cares are unceasing, my time is filled up with domestick labours, my husband requires attention, my children are ever around me, and excite unceasing watchfulness and solicitude. I am unavoidably troubled about many things ; my work is never done. What time have I for the care of my soul ? Busied as I necessarily am with domestick concerns, how can I attend to religious duties ?—Let not this woman suppose, that amidst her domestick labours, she is removed from the path of religion. Her God, who formed the relations of human society, who assigned to the female head of a family the cares of the household, will accept the faithful execution of these duties as services performed for him. Ask not, then, if amidst the concerns of your family you have time to be religious. The careful and conscientious discharge of domestick duties is religion in practice. Yes : in the reasonable attention to the partner of your joys and sorrows, in the necessary care of your children, in the execution of the various and ever succeeding offices of the household, while you perform them under the impression that they are

enjoined by God, and in the hope of approving yourself to his all-seeing eye, you act religiously. You may open your heart to the consolations and hopes afforded by the pleasing reflection, that God, who is a present help in every time of need, will sustain, guide, and bless you, in all your toils and sorrows.

The observations which we have made, may be extended to the offices of publick life, and to every branch of secular business, even to the most menial labour to which a man may be lawfully called. Let the ruler, whose mind is occupied with the affairs of the nation, and whose time is spent in the duties of government, be just, ruling in the fear of God; and then his publick services may be considered as branches of religious duty, and he shall be to political society, as the light of the morning to the natural world, when the sun riseth; even a morning without clouds.

Let the judge and the magistrate, in the execution of their offices, exercise attention and patience, and decide with impartiality, knowing that God is with them in a righteous judgment; and then God will accept and bless them. Let the affluent, while they live in a manner corresponding with their wealth, reflect that riches come of the Lord, use the world without abusing it, considering themselves as the stewards of heaven; and thereby they will lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come. Let hired persons of every description consider the business, which they have lawfully contracted to perform, as a duty enjoined by God; let them execute it, not with eye-service, as men-

pleasers, but as doing service unto the Lord; and then of the Lord will they receive their recompense.

The duty of stated employment extends to every portion of the six days : we may not, therefore, suspend our weekly business under the pretence of attention to religious exercises not enjoined. In these cases, the question ever occurs, Who hath required this at your hands ? The direction is as imperative to work six days, as it is to rest on the seventh. As we may not carry the labours of the week into the Sabbath, so we may not carry the rest of the Sabbath into the week. The man who essentially neglects his secular employments to join in unrequired offices of piety, has not the countenance of religion; on the contrary, he suspends a duty enjoined by religion, to offer upon the altar of Heaven unhallowed sacrifice.

You will understand me, my Christian brethren. The business of the week does not exclude exercises of devotion in the family or closet. It is but seldom that the most urgent transactions of society need suspend those offices of piety which are proper for a family; and this suspension can be only occasional. The stated employments of men will also give place to occasional exercises of publick worship. Works of necessity and mercy are justifiable on the Sabbath; and particular seasons may with propriety be set apart for religion. The exceptions in both cases prove the general rule. But these occasional exercises of religious worship must not have so frequent recurrence, as to operate injuriously upon the important occupations of the week. They who neglect the great duties of the family,

to join in exercises denominated religious, violate the essential principles of Christianity; for they omit indispensable duties enjoined by God, to engage in services which he has not required. The stated business of society is no hindrance to those silent reflections upon religious subjects, to which the character and condition of man ever invite. These are proper at all times; and they are no less the foundation of moral stability, than the source of self-approbation and delight. No man need be so completely occupied in secular affairs, as not to find seasonable moments to devote to meditations, which may arm him with resolution to repel assaults made upon his virtuous habits in his intercourse with the world.

The common employments of the week will also admit of that interchange of social offices which is adapted to the several ages and situations of men. But even here a sense of moral obligation should be manifested. I do not mean a sanctimonious countenance, using scriptural phrases, associating the names of God and Christ with the ordinary concerns of the world, or intruding sacred subjects into every company. A man may do all this, and yet not possess the spirit of the gospel. I mean, that religion should regulate our social intercourse, and preside over our most pleasurable enjoyments. In the hours of relaxation, at social entertainments, it should restrain us within the bounds of propriety, chasten our mirth, and confine us to those gratifications which will yield satisfaction in the moments of sober reflection. But neither the cheerful pleasures, which within the prescribed bounds are com-

mendable, nor even such services of the altar as are not divinely prescribed, must be allowed to interfere with those secular employments, which God, by the very condition of our being, has made necessary, and which he has expressly enjoined by revelation. To neglect duties commanded, that we may zealously engage in exercises not required, is to substitute our own devices for the counsels of Heaven. The usual consequences which arise from the multiplication of religious meetings during the week, are divisions in Christian societies, and alienation and bitterness among brethren of the same community. Those who attend these meetings, are apt to consider themselves as more religious than such as discountenance them ; and they often abound in severe censures and uncharitable judgments. From disapprobation of these assemblies, some may be induced to condemn practices, which in themselves are worthy of imitation ; and thus, from the abuse of religion, prejudices are excited against it. These alienations and prejudices not unfrequently find their way into families, interrupt the order and harmony of domestick society, suppress in its members the Christian spirit, and impede their progress in the divine life.*

* The history of the Christian world fully shows that evils always result from the attempt of men to supply any supposed deficiency in the institutions of Heaven. The Romish Church, not satisfied with the appointed observances of the Sabbath, early began to consecrate days to the religious commemoration of their Saints. This Church continued to canonize Saints, and appropriate set times for religious purposes, until people were drawn by ecclesiastical authority from their secular employments for nearly one half of each year, to attend upon the exercises of their Holy-days. This imposition still occasions great injury to society in most papal countries.

Such evils ensue, when men leave the appointed paths of Christian duty, to follow the impulse of their own imaginations.

By the multiplication of religious meetings during the week, men have suffered in their spiritual, as well as in their secular interests. Although the motives of those who commence a course of attendance upon conferences, and other religious services of human device, may be pure, and particular instances of reformation may thereby be produced ; yet their general consequences have been injurious to the true interests of Christianity. Among their moral evil effects, the following may be reckoned. These meetings have been multiplied to an unreasonable extent, and holden at unseasonable hours. They have excited in their attendants itching ears, and induced people to heap up to themselves teachers. They have been frequently converted into mere instruments to make proselytes to a party. Some persons have been led to suppose that the exercises of these assemblies are not simply, in their best state, the means or the expressions of piety, but religion in its essence ; they have therefore estimated their attainments in religion by the frequency with which they have joined in those exercises. Under impressions of this nature, they have been induced to deem those who disapprove of their meetings, as the opposers of religion, as the opposers of God ; and have cherished in themselves a presumptuous confidence in their own views of Christian truth, and a vain assurance of their own safety ; and indulged towards those who differ from them a censorious and condemning spirit.

In many places the multiplication of religious meetings during the week has been promotive of a high degree of enthusiasm. Religion in such instances has degenerated into mere passion. The understanding of a man has thereby been darkened, and he, in the highest concerns of religion, subjected to all the fluctuations of animal feelings.—This hour, in imagination, he is elevated to the very mount of communion with Heaven ; the next, he is depressed to the very depths of despair. At one time, he is loud in his pious ejaculations ; and at another, he is noisy in the expression of a widely different affection.—This man, during the period of excitement, is disturbed in the essential pursuits of his existence ; and it not unfrequently happens that, with this period, his religious principles pass away ; and he not only forgets his zealous professions, but also appears to have lost his sense of religious obligation.

2. The duties of the Christian Sabbath.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

The appropriation of particular seasons for moral reflection, and for the worship of our Maker, is supported by natural religion. God was pleased to consecrate one seventh part of time for these high purposes; and our Divine Lord and his apostles gave their sanction to the devotion of this particular portion of time to the important concerns of moral and religious life. In setting apart, therefore, one day in seven for religious observances, we act agreeably to the dictates of enlightened reason, conform to a positive institution of Heaven, and follow the example of Christ, his apostles, and the Christian world.

The Sabbath was originally designed to commemorate the creation of the world. The benevolent Author of being appointed it as a day of rest and joy to his rational offspring on earth. It is the divine direction, that all unnecessary labour cease on this day; and that men seriously enter into meditations, and join in exercises, which are calculated to preserve a knowledge of their Maker, maintain a sense of their continual dependence, and cherish those feelings of love and gratitude, which are the best returns they can make for the blessings they receive.

Rest, then, is the first duty of the Sabbath. The rest from labour must extend to our children, to the hired servant, and to the stranger who is occasionally in our employ. The benevolence of this command must excite the admiration of the philanthropist. That labourer will not consider his situation

forlorn, who has the Sabbath in prospect, when his toils will be suspended, and his heart opened to the joys and delights of social and moral life. And who does not rejoice, that the patient and useful domestick animal has occasional seasons of rest? The experience of ages teaches us, that no inconvenience results to society from the observance of this institution; whilst throughout Chistendom the laborious dependent is hereby relieved from the severity of a hard-hearted task-master. It is the opinion of many men of sound judgment, that the suspension of labour every seventh day is no hindrance to the accomplishment of the great business of the world; but that, by the invigorated strength acquired on the day of rest, they who religiously observe the Sabbath may accomplish as much in the six days, as they could in seven spent in unre-mitted application.

This day of rest is favourable to those improvements which are the most important to every individual of mankind. Let us contemplate the benefits of the Sabbath, as the time appropriated to religious meditation and to the worship of God.

Considering man as a free and accountable being, we cannot conceive of measures better fitted for his attainments in moral life, than the reflections and services becoming this institution. We may not expect that God will grant us divine influences to force us to a state of goodness in a manner incompatible with the proper exercise of our powers, or beyond the established order of his government.

In the administrations of Heaven, methods are adopted as certain and as effectual to accomplish

the purposes of our moral as our natural lives. In the one case as the other, if we neglect the appointed means, we have no reason to expect that the end will be accomplished. If with sincerity and perseverance we adopt the prescribed measures, we may in both promise ourselves a blessing. Are men prepared for Heaven by the irresistible operations of the Spirit of God? Why, then, the immense apparatus of means, used in the moral government of our world? God in his works has no occasion for secondary causes. He wills, and the universe obeys. Mark the difference in respect to moral cultivation between Christian and heathen countries; between those places where our holy religion is professed, in which its institutions are observed, and those in which they are wholly neglected. Here you will perceive that moral attainments result, by divine blessing, from the diligent improvement of those advantages which God has bestowed. How important, then, is the recurrence of a day in which worldly labours are suspended, the mind withdrawn from earthly pursuits, and our affections warmed and elevated by contemplating the goodness and mercy displayed by the mediation of Jesus Christ: a day in which our views and hopes are raised to that brighter world, to which the Prince of Life ascended, that he may provide mansions of blessedness for his disciples.

Ye men who fill learned professions, and you who are engaged in the higher branches of worldly business, I invite you to give undivided attention for the moment to the subject before us. You are

acquainted with the philosophy of the mind : you know the nature of habits. Report, then, the effects produced on the mind, on manners, and character, by confining the attention intensely to one subject, and by long and ardently pursuing a particular line of action. By causes of this nature a peculiar cast of mind is formed, and distinct traits of character are established. This peculiarity of character, resulting from appropriate pursuits, becomes apparent, from the judge on the bench, to the man employed in the most humble occupation of private life. Can you, then, doubt the efficacy of serious and devout meditation upon moral concerns ; of raising the soul above sublunary things, and dwelling upon the pursuits and enjoyments of a higher state of being ? Are not such seasons of moral reflection calculated to rouse the mind from the too common indifference to the interests of immortality ; and to enliven a zeal, and to invigorate exertions for attainments necessary to life eternal ? By these means may not progress be made in the path which leads to the goal of moral perfection, in the same manner as you acquire knowledge of the principles of your profession, and skill in the execution of the business entrusted to your management ? When for a long period your attention is diverted from your appropriate studies, or when you neglect particular branches of your professional business, do you find that you lose a familiar acquaintance with them, and that you are embarrassed when you resume their practice ? And are moral habits the only qualities which a man cannot lose by inattention to the means of their acquirement,

preservation, and growth? Are moral exercises so natural to man, possessed as he is of irregular passions, and surrounded by temptations to vice, that they ever will be performed like instinctive movements, without attention or effort? Far different is our moral condition. No individual comes to a stand in a moral path. If he do not make progress, he will fall back in his course; and his retrograde movement will, in all probability, be, like that of a falling body, constantly accelerated. If you cease to cultivate moral feelings, and neglect the exercises of piety, soon will some irregular passion become so strong, and some evil habit so inveterate, as to render the re-ascension to the path of Christian virtue almost above the strength of human resolution.

Do you find it necessary occasionally to suspend your professional studies and appropriate pursuits, to enter the social circle, and participate in the communications of neighbours and friends, lest you should become selfish in your feelings, recluse in your habits, and be formed to characters dissocial and unamiable? Is it not as necessary at particular periods to retire from the busy scenes of the world, that you may hold secret communion with your own hearts, take a retrospective view of your lives, and ponder upon the issue of your actions, lest your employments and pleasures should rivet you to the present state, your minds become, in all their powers, and affections earthly and sensual, and you grow stupidly indifferent to the interests of your immortal souls? Is it not as necessary, at times, to close your eyes on the whole scene of material things,

that your minds may be elevated above the earth, that you may contemplate the glories of that heavenly country which the Christian revelation has brought within our prospect, and thereby be animated to proper exertions for those progressive improvements in knowledge and attainments in virtue, which form the true dignity of man, lay the solid basis for self-satisfaction, and compose the essential qualifications for admission into the society of heaven?

Is it expedient for you to form the domestick relation, that in the bosom of a family the best feelings of the heart may be cultivated, that you may have objects on which your kindly affections may be exercised, and who may partake with you in the rewards of your exertions, and with you rejoice in the bounty of God? And is it not expedient that you improve the opportunity afforded by the institutions of Christianity, to cultivate the higher affections of the soul, love to God and love to Christ—which aid your endeavours in forming a close relation with higher orders of beings, in making nearer approaches to the divine character, and in thus preparing you for entrance into the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem? There you will be admitted to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. In this society you will behold brighter displays of divine perfections, be admitted to more intimate communion with your God, and participate in joys intel-

lectual, social and moral, pure, perfect and perpetual.

Offices of publick worship are important, as well as the devotions of the closet, and the religious meditations of the retired hours of the Sabbath.— Was your object in attending the sanctuary to be entertained by the composition, or charmed with the eloquence of the preacher, I should advise you wholly to absent yourselves from this place on the day devoted to the publick offices of religion ; or, if you should think your station in society impels you to occasional attendance, I should justify your taking a position the most favourable to quiet repose. But the highest purposes await you in the house of God. You there assemble to render religious homage to your Maker, to be reminded of your privileges and obligations as the disciples of Christ, and to be exhorted to the performance of your duty as candidates for immortality. Are pious affections so firmly established in your hearts, as not to need the influence of publick worship to strengthen them ? Are you in no danger from the temptations of the world, with which you are surrounded ? Are you secured against supineness and indifference in the concerns of religion ? And is there no need that your pure minds should be awakened to the remembrance of your duty ? Do the Christian virtues spring up spontaneously in your hearts ? And have they no need of culture to bring them to maturity ? Unless you can give satisfactory answers to these questions, you must acknowledge the worth of the publick exercises of the Christian Sabbath, which are fitted to strengthen

your religious principles, exalt your piety, confirm your virtuous habits, clothe you in armour to meet the conflicts of the Christian warfare, and enable you to join in the triumphant song for the victory which the Captain of your salvation has obtained over death.

You will also reflect that you have influence in society, and many will follow your example. If you neglect the offices appropriate to the Sabbath, others will be induced to neglect them. And what would be the state of society, if our publick altars were prostrated, and all Christian institutions set aside ? In all probability, with the form the power of godliness would be banished. Perhaps you are heads of families, and children are rising up around you. If parents slight the observances of the Sabbath, children will probably imbibe their spirit, think as lightly of the offices of our religion, be as negligent in attending publick worship, and, when in the house of God, sleep as soundly as their fathers.

The general observations already made will apply to all those who are occupied in mechanick business, and to those who are engaged in agricultural pursuits. And to you, my friends, additional and appropriate remarks may be addressed.—Worldly employment is incumbent on you through the week. On the six days, therefore, your advantages for the acquisition of knowledge must be comparatively small, and your opportunities few for close and continued meditations upon religious subjects. How important, then, is the Sabbath to you ! On this day of rest you may enter into an

examination of yourselves, and learn the moral condition of your souls. You may inquire into your actions during the past week, and, your hearts not condemning you, you may have confidence towards God. If you are humbled by the review of many deficiencies and defects, you may be induced to form effectual resolutions of more vigorous application to your duty in future, and to set the necessary guard against the temptations by which you are the most powerfully assailed. Never, then, I entreat you, never let this day pass in sloth and idleness; spend it not in a manner worse than idleness, in corrupting visits, and licentious practices. Are you sufficiently apprized of the advantages attending the publick institutions of our religion? Esteem it not a light thing, that you are permitted to assemble with the people of God, to offer the publick sacrifice of praise and thanks to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, for life and health, for success in the labour of your hands, and for the capacity of enjoying the goods you possess; to confess your unworthiness in the divine presence, and to implore the pardon of your sins through the Mediator; to supplicate from that gracious Being, in whose hand your life is, and whose are all your ways, a blessing on the house and on the field, and assistance in the performance of those services on which eternal life is suspended. Do you deem it no privilege, that you are permitted to attend weekly lectures from the pulpit upon the character and government of God, upon the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments of the invis-

ible world ; to hear the doctrines of the gospel explained, its duties inculcated, and its motives, in all their variety and persuasive influence, addressed to the human mind ? If you neglect these means of spiritual improvement, can you entertain the expectation of becoming wise to the salvation of your souls ? Attend, then, habitually the publick worship enjoined on the Sabbath. This attendance will soon become your delight ; and, in answer to your petitions for attainments in the divine life, you may confidently hope for the benediction of God.

Or, if indifferent for yourselves, be persuaded to remember the Sabbath day for the benefit of your children. Some, indeed, appear to slight religious obligations, as it respects themselves ; and, to gain the riches and pleasures of the world, seem disposed to lose their own souls. But do parents exist, who are indifferent whether their children be virtuous or vicious ? No : whatever be the practice of a father, he will recommend the path of virtue to his child. Reflect, then, I beseech you, upon the many advantages to be derived from the appropriate exercises of the Sabbath, in the Christian education of your children. On this day you may call your offspring and dependents around you, and give them that counsel which is suited to their age ; open the volume of inspiration for their instruction, and lead them to the knowledge of all essential religious truths. Catechisms put into your hands will afford you some assistance in the endeavour to establish in their tender minds the great doctrines of the gospel, and the important duties of the Christian character, and to give them some worthy apprehensions

of God, who made them, and of the Saviour, who died to open for their entrance the gate of immortality. On this day you may bring your children to the publick altar, dedicate them to the Lord, and favour them with the appropriate instruction of his house.

You are duly solicitous to form your children for the business of society, and to teach them the arts of acquiring the goods of the world. Is the body of more worth than the soul? Is time of more estimation than eternity? Is earth to be preferred to heaven? If not, statedly bring your children from the instruction of the family to that of the pulpit, in the animating hope, that the reiterated impressions there made will, by a divine blessing, produce the desired effect; that they will be grounded and settled in religious principles, trained up in the way in which they should walk, ever be the objects of your joy and delight, become estimable through human relations, and qualified for the services and happiness of eternity.

If you neglect to improve the advantages which the institutions of our religion furnish in this high concern, and in consequence your children should wander into the devious paths of sin, with what feelings will you witness their progress towards disgrace and misery? Follow the son, whose Christian education you have neglected, through the course of profligacy, and mark the ruin of his constitution, his forfeiture of reputation, and the sacrifice of every earthly blessing. Behold him on the bed of sickness and death, and dwell on his condition in a future world as a hardened sinner. Then reflect that his present misery and final perdition are

occasioned by your criminal neglect ; and that his soul will be required at your hands. Place yourselves in a situation like this : conceive, if you can, the anguish attending it ; anguish, which I am unable to describe, and which, God grant, none of us may experience.

To female heads of families our subject is peculiarly important. In the early education of children their influence is superior ; and in religion, as it respects all domestick relations, they have a high interest. Whether the partners of their lives feel the force of parental obligation, and faithfully discharge its duties, or desert their sacred trust for the unsubstantial pleasures of dissipation, and the pernicious practices of gaming, mothers are necessarily confined to the cares of the household. On them their infant offspring are absolutely dependent, and by them those early impressions are made which often give an effectual bias to the mind, direct the moral course of the life, and form the character of the future man. The exercises of the Sabbath are not less beneficial as they furnish the best assistance in the performance of maternal duty, than as they offer support and consolation under all the trials and disappointments of this relation.

The attention of the poor to our subject need not be solicited. To them the Sabbath is the greatest blessing. Amidst all their toils, it secures them one day of rest in seven, without any diminution of their income. For such are the regulations of society, that they receive as large a recompense for the services of six days, as they would for the seven, had not the Sabbath been enjoined. The time du-

ring which their labour is suspended, they may devote to those reflections and exercises, which will animate them to sustain with patience their situation in society, contentedly submit to the dispensations of Providence, and inspire them with hope and joy in the contemplation of futurity. In the publick worship of the Sabbath, the humble sons of poverty meet the powerful and the affluent on the floor of equality. In the house of God, the rich and the poor appear as children of the same Parent, disciples of the same Master, and joint candidates for a glorious immortality. By the attainments of the Christian life, they become qualified for the heavenly kingdom, where all distinctions will be lost, except those of a moral nature. If they wisely improve the privileges which the gospel bestows, and amidst worldly poverty become rich towards God, at the close of their probationary scene durable treasures will be conferred upon them, even an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which will not fade away.

To persons of every age and condition, in conclusion, I remark, that the publick institutions of our religion are established by the authority of God; our serious and habitual attendance upon them is the method which he has appointed to acquire the qualifications of the Christian character; and in their observance we may expect the promised support and acceptance of Heaven. Slighting the proposals of love and mercy, will you adopt your own devices in place of the institutions of God? Try your independent scheme in the concerns of the natural world. Refuse to cultivate your fields in seed-time;

and command them to yield their fruits in the appointed weeks of harvest. No: here you realize your dependence upon Divine Providence, and you diligently adopt the prescribed means, relying on the divine blessing to accomplish the end. Equally dependent in the moral world, with similar diligence observe the methods established by God for your obtaining the fruits of piety, and righteousness, and charity; humbly looking to Him to bless your endeavours even to the salvation of your souls.

By all these considerations, be persuaded to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

SERMON XXV.

THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE GOSPEL.

JOHN v. 40.

Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.

THIS solemn declaration was originally made by our Saviour to his countrymen. They were blinded by their prejudices, and hardened by their sins; and against themselves, they rejected the counsel of God, delivered by his son Jesus Christ. But to many, in each subsequent age, might the warning voice of our text have been addressed. Will it be heard by any present without effect?

From the passage before us, I shall

1. Explain the import of the word Life, which our Saviour promises to all who will come to him.
2. Define the meaning of the phrase, Come to Christ.
3. State the means with which we are favoured to facilitate a compliance with the condition of the promised blessing.

1. To explain the import of the word Life, which our Saviour promises to all who will come to him. The gift of God by Jesus Christ is eternal life. Death was introduced into our world as the wages of sin. Suppose the darkness and gloom of the night of death were never to be removed by the light of returning day, who without horror could contemplate its approach? Its certainty might depress the purest joys of the human heart; check the noblest pursuits of man, and fill the whole condition of his being with despondence.

From this state of darkness and despair, we are delivered by the mediation and ministry of Christ. He has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. He has conquered the king of terrors, and redeemed the captives of the tomb from the empire of death. The resurrection of Jesus is a pledge for the fulfilment of the divine promise to raise his disciples from the sleep of the grave to the honours of immortality. The life therefore which is promised to those, who in sincerity come to Christ, is not merely existence beyond the grave, nor only the removal of doubt respecting the reality of a future state. The certainty of future existence would not alone satisfy the inquisitive mind. Distressing perplexity would yet remain, and questions with the utmost anxiety still be asked—What will be my condition in a future world, for which I am certainly destined? If I am a candidate for future happiness, on what terms may I obtain it? Will God permit the subjects of his moral government with impunity to violate his laws? If frail beings, conscious that they often offend, and daily fall short

of their duty, may attain to a blessed immortality, what assistance may they expect in acquiring the necessary qualifications for the enjoyments of a higher state of being? On what foundation may they build the sustaining hope that they have a title to the imperishable treasures of a future world?

In these questions all have a deep interest; yet what difficulty attends their solution by human reason? Into how many errors and perplexities have they actually fallen, who attempted by the light of nature to answer them? The Christian revelation gives satisfactory information on all these questions. It not only dispels doubt respecting our future existence, but enables us to dwell on the prospect of immortality with serenity and delight. By its instruction and assistance we may with safety and assurance pursue our course in the path to immortality. We then perceive that Christ came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. By him our prospects are infinitely enlarged. He has opened the eternal world, in all its sublimity, to our contemplation; and given us directions that will make us wise to salvation. In his own life, he has embodied his religion, that we may daily behold its living excellence: in the path opened before us, he has left traces of his own course, that we may follow his footsteps to the goal of Christian perfection; by making his own life a sacrifice, he has redeemed us from the power of death: by rising in triumph from the grave, he has enstamped with the seal of Almighty God, the title of his disciples to eternal life; and they may yield to the summons of death, in the sure and certain hope of a blessed immortality.

2. To define the meaning of the phrase, Come to Christ.

Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. God, the original source of every blessing, has commissioned his Son to be the author of salvation to all them who obey him. In the execution of this divine appointment, Jesus established his reign on earth, and introduced a new system of moral administration among men. He revealed all truth pertaining to eternal life, enacted laws as a rule of conduct to his subjects, and prescribed measures by which they might acquire the qualifications of his true disciples, and become prepared for those future rewards which are the objects of their faith, hope, and pursuit. These observations will enable us to understand that clause of our text under consideration.

To come to Christ, is humbly to receive him as the Messiah; voluntarily acknowledge our allegiance to his government; publicly profess ourselves to be his disciples, and seriously observe the institutions of his appointment. God has given us to Christ in the covenant of grace and mercy: God draws us to the Saviour by the instruction, the assistance, and the promises of the gospel. To secure the promised rewards, under the influence of our religion, we must acquire the qualifications of the Christian character, that we may at last be found worthy of admittance into those mansions, which he is now preparing in his Father's house for those who follow him in the path of obedience to the divine will.

Any other coming to Christ than faith in his mission, and a compliance with his requisitions ; any reliance on his merits short of a heart and life formed by his precepts, as the requisite preparation for the happiness secured by his mediation and ministry to his faithful disciples, has no warrant in scripture. The Christian temper, and, when opportunity is given, habits of piety and virtue, are essential as a preparation for the happiness of heaven. These necessary qualifications all will acquire, who with sincerity adopt the prescribed means.

3. To state the means with which we are favoured, to facilitate a compliance with the condition of the promised blessing.

By the constitution of Christianity, as Christ and his apostles established it, provision is made to perpetuate its existence, and to give efficacy to its principles. The means with which we are favoured embrace the sacred scriptures, the ministrations of the sabbath, and all the ordinances of the gospel. But your attention at this time will be directed particularly to the publick profession of religion, the rite of baptism, and the sacrament of the supper.

In positive institutions, men are apt to run into opposite extremes ; either to neglect them, on the plea that they are without efficacy, or to depend on them as the substance of religion. Positive institutions are designed to give assistance to men in acquiring the affections of the children of God, and confirming themselves in Christian habits. But on these, none should rest as the end of the commandment. When dependence is placed on these institutions as the ultimate design of religion, they

are perverted, and the observance of them is neither acceptable to God, nor profitable to man. Belief, profession, and all ceremonial observances, without a corresponding life and conversation, are unavailing. Religion, to be effectual, must dwell in the heart, and produce the fruit of obedience. Still positive institutions are important, and serious attendance on them promotes the design of the gospel. The observance of these institutions is a sacred duty, because these were enjoined by the authority of Christ, and they are adapted to the moral improvement of beings in the condition of men.

In primitive times, when the governments of the world were opposed to the Christian system, the publick profession of Christ was required, though it was made at the hazard of life. We may determine whether we will comply with the conditions of salvation, and thereby qualify ourselves for the rewards of immortality ; but it is not at our option, whether we shall be brought under allegiance to the government of the Saviour. All, who are favoured with the Christian revelation are under indispensable obligations to improve its advantages. The manner in which men now profess themselves Christians is not important. If they manifest their belief of the truth of Christianity by supporting its establishments, acknowledging their obligations to obey its laws, by an habitual attendance on its publick institutions, and support this profession by a Christian life, they comply with the requisition of the gospel.

Baptism is a right by which persons are initiated into the Christian church. It is a sign of the gra-

cious promise of God to accept the disciple, and of the obligation of Christians to devote themselves to God by piety of heart, and purity of life through Jesus the mediator. Adults by baptism acquire a title to all Christian privileges, enter into a solemn covenant to have their conversation as becometh the gospel, and receive an assurance of eternal life as the reward of evangelical obedience.

Parents, when they present their children for baptism, promise in the presence of God faithfully to execute the parental trust. They thereby give a sacred pledge to the Christian society of which they are members, that they will use their best endeavours, by precept and example, to educate their children in the principles, and train them up in the virtues of the gospel.

The rite of the supper in its original appointment was plain and simple. Our Saviour directed his disciples to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of him; telling them, that the bread was intended as an emblem of his body, and the wine of his blood, which were to be made a sacrifice for their benefit. That this institution is designed for the observance of Christian disciples in every age, is manifest from the example of primitive professors, and from express declarations of St. Paul. St. Luke informs us, in the book of Acts, that the Christian converts "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." St. Paul, after stating the origin and design of the rite of the supper, observes, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come."

Here we surely find authority for the celebration of the supper till the second advent of our Divine Lord.

The Lord's supper is usually denominated a sacrament. This is not a scriptural phrase: it was probably borrowed from the Romans. The oath of fidelity to his general, administered to a Roman soldier, was called a sacrament. Pliny, the governour of a Roman province, in the first Christian century, giving information to the Emperor respecting Christians, says, "they are accustomed to meet together before it is light, and to bind themselves by a sacrament." To consider the communion service as a renewal of our allegiance to Jesus Christ, and as a renewed promise to obey his laws, is consistent with the design of its appointment; though it does not clearly imply that endearing relation which we bear to the Saviour, nor those grateful recollections of his benevolent agency, which should dwell in our minds while at the table of our Lord. Some Christians of the present day, I fear, consider the term sacrament merely as the name of a religious rite; and that a greater number attach to the word a mysterious sanctity. Clear views of this solemn but joyous service are important to all. Whoever will, with an unprejudiced mind, attend to the representation of the supper made by the evangelists, and particularly examine the form in which our Saviour instituted, and the manner in which he and his disciples observed it, may understand this sacrament in its origin, nature, and tendency.

In the first ages of Christianity a marked distinction was not made between the sacrament of the supper, and other Christian rites. This ordinance

was considered as a part of the established exercises of the sabbath, and administered every Lord's day to all who attended on publick worship.

Among learned heathen nations there were schools or colleges in which moral science was taught and various religious ceremonies were practised. In these, profound secrecy was affected, much formality observed in the admission of members, and every degree of information denied to those not initiated. When the initiated pagan philosophers were converted to Christianity, they unhappily carried into our religion too many of the views formed by their previous education. The notion of mystery was now associated with the rite of the supper, and Christian divines taught people that the consecrated elements had in themselves virtue to sanctify the communicant. From this, they proceeded by gradual steps to the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation, which, in all its extravagance, the papal church established as an essential truth of revelation. From this gross corruption of a simple rite, many weak and debasing superstitions resulted. The eucharist was encircled with mystery and holiness, which filled the minds of men with awe and astonishment. Believing that the consecrated elements were the real body and blood of Christ, many members of the Christian community were by tenderness of conscience deterred from approaching the Lord's table, and the most serious approached it with fear and trembling.

In process of time, these holy elements were represented as possessing not only virtue to sanctify the soul, but also power to heal the diseases of the

body, and to preserve life amidst perils and dangers the most imminent. That the sacramental bread might be in readiness for any emergency, it was prepared in the form of wafers: these, Romish priests consecrated in abundance, and made them an article of traffick.

Protestants have discarded these gross corruptions of the papal church; but a relict of their superstition has been transmitted to us. Many in our day entertain an opinion that the sacrament of the supper is in its nature more sacred than any other office of religion, and in consequence suppose that an individual must have satisfactory proof that he is qualified to join the society of saints in heaven before he is fitted to approach the communion table. From this cause, multitudes are restrained from a participation in this ordinance, who fully acknowledge the truth of Christianity, and habitually join in the common offices of publick worship; and many are found in this number, whom we are bound in charity to view as Christians in temper and conduct. We meet at the Lord's table only a small proportion of the serious part of a congregation. Yet the command is express—"This do in remembrance of me." The above positions I deem to be incorrect. This sacrament is not more holy than are some other offices of our religion. There can be no higher act of religion than direct communion with God in prayer. The sincerity that renders publick or private prayer acceptable to Deity, will be accepted in the observance of all other Christian ordinances. Perfect saints will hold communion in heaven. The institutions of the gospel are appointed as means of

progressive improvements in Christian life. The qualifications requisite for the consistent observance of the rite of the supper may be limited to two articles, viz. to belief in the truth of the Christian religion, and a sincere desire to live in conformity to the directions of Jesus, our Saviour. All who thus believe and resolve, have a right to this ordinance. In its observance they will find comfort and joy ; their good resolutions will hereby be strengthened, their pious endeavours invigorated, and their Christian hopes enlivened.

While engaged in the busy scenes of the world, and surrounded with objects of sense, we all need the ceremonial services of our religion to direct our attention to our immortal interests, and animate us to habitual endeavours to acquire the qualifications of the Christian character. Heads of families, parents in special, will seriously reflect on their duty to confess Christ before men, and to observe the ordinances of his appointment. It must be the desire of parents, that Christian principles should be early implanted in the minds of children, and that they practise the Christian virtues. To produce this effect, your example must enforce your instruction. The mature judgment of manhood enables you to form an opinion of the character of men, principally from the fruits produced in practical life. But the minds of children are not capable of this view.—The visibility of religion in their parents, is to them, in a great degree, confined to forms. If they perceive that their parents are indifferent to the public institutions of the gospel, and neglect an at-

tendance on those publick services which are deemed the highest offices of religion, they will not easily be persuaded that religious principles are established in the hearts of their parents, or that these have a controlling influence over their practices. Your spirit of indifference your children will naturally imbibe ; but they will not readily distinguish between principle and form, and there is danger that with the form they may discard the power of religion. You cannot question whether the positive institutions of the gospel be important to your children as means of Christian knowledge and of progress in moral life. You might as well expect that they would become learned in a science without studying its elementary principles, or skilful in an art without manual practice in the use of its essential instruments, as that they will acquire the knowledge of Christian truth and attain to habits of Christian virtue without the forms and exercises which aid young minds in these important acquisitions. If then you seek eternal life for yourselves, if you desire to educate your children in the fear of God, and to form them to the Christian character—take your appropriate station in the Christian community, publicly confess yourselves the disciples of an ascended Saviour, and in view of all around you support your title to the treasures of heaven by an uniform obedience to all the commands of Him who will finally bring you to judgment.

With the greatest solicitude I invite youth of both sexes to give their undivided attention to our subject. Will you not, my young brethren, come to Christ that you may have life ? None of you are

fully satisfied with your present enjoyments. On the prospect of distinctions and acquisitions in riper years, you now rest your expectation of worldly enjoyment; and the hope of future success supports you through the studies and labours which lead to the object of promised gratification. The anticipation of future eminence, wealth or usefulness, lightens your toils, and adds renewed energy to your exertions. But all the distinctions of human society, and all the riches of the world, are trifles beneath your notice, when compared with future and immortal life, which Christ has placed within your acquisition. Why not, then, extend your views to that object which alone is worthy of the first attention and the chief pursuit of immortal minds? You are daily warned of the frailty of human life: adopt, then, the appointed means, that you may be prepared for the higher honours and more substantial enjoyments of heaven. Will you say that these means are unnecessary for your Christian improvement? Consult your own passions, examine the temptations of the world, and then judge. Are you deterred by the sight of those who do not honourably support the profession they have made? Put on Christianity, not in semblance, but in reality. Do you fear that you shall unworthily approach the table of our Lord? Are you prepared for the society of just men made perfect in heaven? Then certainly you are worthy of communing with saints on earth. If you are not qualified for admission into the heavenly church, adopt the measures, which your Saviour has provided to make you meet for the rest of saints in the kingdom of light, and lift

up holy hands to God for a blessing. Are you restrained, from an apprehension that by a Christian profession you shall be limited in your worldly pleasures? Christianity forbids no pleasurable enjoyment which becomes your station in society—will secure you peace of mind, promote the grateful intercourse of social life, or give the most satisfaction in the use of the bounties of Providence. If you should, by the influence of religion, be withdrawn from disgraceful and ruinous indulgences, this furnishes the best reason why you should make a religious profession, and resolutely walk by the rules of the gospel. Do you fear the raillery of the light and corrupt of your acquaintance, and on this account deny obedience to the express commands of your Saviour? Remember his solemn declaration—“Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous generation, of him will I be ashamed, when I shall come in the glory of my Father.”

Do the young of the more delicate sex need solicitation to an observance of the dying command of their Saviour? Women have a common interest in the high concerns of salvation; and there are peculiar considerations which lead them to religious observances. Christianity has given them a rank in society which they do not hold under any other religious establishment. Women are excluded from the field of worldly ambition, publick employment, and publick resort. In their domestick situation they are, therefore, in a greater degree dependent on religion for support under the troubles and sorrows of life; and their condition more

particularly invites them to partake of its consolations and joys. Their hearts are more easily opened to impressions of piety, and they are, from constitutional complexion more inclined to devotion; and there are, I believe, more pious women than men. In all our societies we certainly find more female than male communicants. What character then must we give of those women, who appear to be destitute of pious affections, and who live in the neglect of Christian observances? I do not affirm that an impious woman is more criminal in the sight of Heaven than an irreligious man; but I do say that to us she appears to deviate farther from her appropriate character, and therefore to us appears more unamiable and more inexcusable.

Early piety and Christian virtue, my young friends, are your greatest ornaments; and these will prove your best security, and the source of your purest joys. Recall to remembrance the devout women who ministered to our Divine Lord, when on earth he published the glad tidings of peace and salvation. Reflect on the character of the pious Mary, who washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair; and reflect that her name has in every subsequent age been associated with his, and that through all time her memory will be honoured in every land where the gospel shall be published. Like Mary choose the better part. There still is room for you to honour the Saviour. Confess yourselves his disciples, and open your minds to the gracious influence of his religion: come to the feast of love and gratitude: adorn your lives with the virtues and graces of the gospel.

SERMON XXVI.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

MATTHEW xxv. 46.

These shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal.

TO complete the proposed plan of doctrinal discourses, I have only to direct your attention to the retributions of a future state. On the subject of punishment, I shall review three distinct opinions, viz.—

1. The punishment of the wicked in a future world will be endless in duration.

2. The punishments of a future state being disciplinary, will, sooner or later, bring the sinner to repentance, and ultimately the whole human race will be made the subjects of salvation.

3. Future punishments will be of limited duration, and will terminate in the annihilation of the wicked.

The doctrine of interminable punishment will employ our reflections this morning.

Various writers have given great latitude to their imaginations in describing the place and nature of the future punishment of the wicked. But speculations respecting local situation are useless. The whole question is wrapt in impenetrable darkness. Of the nature of future punishments I have few observations to make, because my conceptions on the subject are very limited. The heathen poets are sufficiently explicit on this point, and they represent them to consist in those privations and sufferings which in imagination are the most distressing. The language of scripture, in the description of future punishment is generally figurative ; and Christian divines, in their attempt to explain it, greatly differ. Some approach as near the literal meaning as the case will admit, and suppose that the principal sufferings of the wicked in a future world will be immediately inflicted by the hand of God. Others entertain the opinion that future punishment will chiefly consist in the privation of good, and in the regret and remorse which the wicked will feel in their own minds. In this class Calvin, if I mistake not, is to be numbered. Why should we suppose that in a future world God will inflict on the wicked sufferings in any manner resembling the punishments which are often made the penalty of human laws. If the wicked carry their vicious propensities and their evil habits into the next state of existence, they will carry with them an appropriate and adequate punishment. The prophets of the old testament, denouncing to the Israelites the consequenc-

es of disobedience to the commands of their God, made use of the boldest figures, and from many of them, had not experience instructed us, we should have expected, that the threatenings would have been executed by the immediate hand of Deity ; but in event we find, that God in this, as in most instances, accomplished the moral purposes of his government by the operation of subordinate agents, and of secondary causes. The people of Israel were beset by their own doings. They ploughed wickedness, and reaped iniquity. They sowed the wind, and they reaped the whirlwind.

Admit that the wicked will exist in the next world with the evil dispositions, under which they act in this, and that a due sense of the folly and criminality of their conduct in a state of probation will then rest on their minds, and we can perceive that their future situation must be most deplorable. Separated from God and from all good beings, and congregated among characters as depraved as themselves, their self-accusation, their mutual upbraidings, their dissocial feelings, and malevolent intercourse must form sufferings that cannot easily be described.

The proper design of punishment, Ethick writers assert, is the reformation of the offender, and the prevention of offences in others. In human governments, in *that* instance one of these purposes is principally intended, and in *this* the other. In some cases, as capital excutions, the prevention of crime is the sole object. In view of our subject, we may say, that the design of punishment is to enforce the moral system of the gospel. Je-

sus Christ has legislated in his kingdom. What are laws without a sanction? By what obligations are those precepts enforced, where no penalty accrues from their violation? What is the import of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, if in the allotments of the future world no distinction will be made between the righteous and the wicked? What is the purpose of a probationary state, and to what end is the immense apparatus of means in the dispensations of Providence and grace, if, in the retributions of a future world, no distinction will be made between those, who, by an improvement of their talents, have formed themselves to characters of purity and virtue, and those, who, by their abuse, have hardened themselves in iniquity? If the wicked are to pass at once from this life into the happiness of heaven, what meaning shall we put on the many passages in the New Testament which describe the decisions of the final judgment? Every view we can take of the character of God, of his moral government, and of the final issue of his administrations, forbids the supposition, that God beholds the righteous and the wicked with the same favour; and that he will, at the consummation of the present system of things, place them indiscriminately in the same condition of glory and happiness. Could the doctrine of universal salvation, in the above sense, be with confidence embraced, Christian faith would no longer have efficacy as a principle of moral action—motives to a virtuous life, in prospect of a future retribution would lose all their force; and to all the moral purposes of society, in principle there

could be no difference between the Christian and the Atheist.

One argument in support of eternal punishment is drawn from the nature of sin. Sin is said to be an infinite evil, because it is committed against an infinite being; and therefore the endless duration of the torments of the damned is consistent with the moral perfections of the Deity. To this it is replied, that "the supposition that crime should be heightened by the quality of the object to this degree, is absurd; since the evil and demerit of all sin must be equal, inasmuch as none can be more than infinite, and, consequently, there can be no foundation for degrees of punishment in the next life. Add, that for the same reason as the least sin against God is infinite in respect of its object, the least punishment inflicted by God may be said to be infinite because of its author, and thus all punishments from, as well as sins against God, would be equal. Whereas, both scripture and reason prove that there are different degrees of guilt, proportioned to the different circumstances attending them. To this consideration the advocates of eternal punishment reply, that where the duration of the punishment is equal, there may be such a difference in degree as may be correspondent to the degree of the crime; and if this answer be not satisfactory, it will be difficult to say how the different degrees of eternal rewards can be vindicated as consistent with itself."

Another argument in proof of the perpetuity of future punishments is drawn from the nature of evil habits. It is affirmed, that if sinners live forever, they will forever sin, and therefore merit end-

less punishment. But it is asked—Who can aver, that if a man live ever so long, he would never be brought to repentance? God, in his justice, punishes only those sins which men have actually committed. It is further declared, that the punishments of God are not vindictive; they are not intended merely to inflict misery on the offender, but are parental chastisements.

Some urge the plea of endless punishment from the consideration that God has placed life and death before men, and has left them at liberty to choose eternal happiness or endless misery; and the reward promised to obedience is equal to the punishment threatened to disobedience; and therefore God, in consistency with his justice and goodness, may inflict endless misery on those who reject the offers of salvation. To this argument the answer is, though it be not contrary to justice to confer a reward of obedience disproportionate to the merit of the service performed, this being a grant of favour; yet it is inconsistent with justice to inflict a punishment in degree above or beyond the merit of disobedience; and it cannot be proved that man, weak and frail, naturally possessing passions which are the occasion of sin, and surrounded with circumstances which often furnish temptations to evil, by the vices of the present life justly exposes himself to eternal torment in a world to come. The punishment is evidently disproportionate to the crime; and it is impossible to reconcile this punishment with the character of God. To say that the eternal punishment of the human sinner may answer important purposes on other parts of the moral

government of Deity, is no vindication of the doctrine. God is not thus limited in the principles of his government. It is not necessary that he should inflict unjust punishment on one individual moral agent, that he may accomplish the design of his divine administrations on other portions of his dominions. The pious and learned Archbishop Tillotson defends the doctrine of eternal punishment on the authority of scripture. He correctly observes, that the duration of the happiness of the righteous is sometimes expressed by the same terms that are used to express the duration of the punishments of the wicked. The language of scripture will be noticed under a following branch of our subject. For the present it is enough to remark, that there is a striking difference in the expressions, eternal life, and eternal death. The one imports endless duration of being; the other, a total extinction of existence. The great and good prelate, pressed with the objection of the inconsistency of eternal torments with the acknowledged attributes of Deity, endeavours to solve the difficulty by the following observations:—"The measure of penalties, with respect to crimes, is not only nor always taken from the quality and degree of the offence, much less from the duration and continuance of it; but from the reasons of government, which properly require such penalties as may secure the observation of the law, and deter men from the breach of it." Observing that this is the fact in human governments, the Dr. proceeds—"In effect, what proportion crimes and penalties are to bear to each other, is not so properly a consideration of jus-

tice as of wisdom and prudence in the Law-giver, who may enforce his laws with what penalties he pleases, without any impeachment of his justice, which is out of the question." Here we may perceive how a great mind labours to support a false maxim. Is there no injustice in inflicting a punishment above the guilt of the crime, because the offender might have refrained from the violation of the law, and thereby have escaped the penalty? Our candid author, apparently dissatisfied with his own reasoning, adds—"After all, it is to be considered that he who threatens has the power of execution in his own hands. There is this difference between promises and threatenings—that he who promises passes over a right to another, and thereby stands obliged to him, in justice and faithfulness, to make good his words; but it is otherwise in threatenings. He that threatens keeps the right of punishing still with himself, and is not obliged to execute what he has threatened any further than the reasons and ends of government require." Does this satisfy us? In the administration of human government, circumstances may arise which were not foreseen by the legislator, and which may render it expedient to set aside the penalty of violated law in favour of the offender; but no such reason can exist in the government of God. He saw the end from the beginning: he weighed all the circumstances of human weakness and human temptation: he adapted his laws to the capacities of men, and affixed a righteous penalty as the wages of transgression; and no reason can be assigned why it should not be inflicted on the impenitent. The

language in the New Testament is as plain and explicit that the punishment threatened shall be carried into execution on the sinner, as that the promised reward shall be conferred on the child of God ; and though we cannot say that it is inconsistent with the faithfulness of God to save the offender from the threatened suffering, yet is this so easily reconciled with his veracity ? Would not any government render itself weak and contemptible which should solemnly affix a penalty to a law, with the settled determination never to carry it into execution ? God certainly has not threatened sinners with punishment that cannot be inflicted consistently with the attributes which compose his character. Have we not, then, every reason to expect that the penalty of the divine law will be executed in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ ? If, then, the eternal punishment of the sinner be inconsistent with the divine character, we may be assured that this punishment is not threatened by the revelation of God.

The doctrine of eternal punishment has often been brought as an objection against the Christian system. It can with great difficulty, if at all, be reconciled with the justice and goodness of God ; and we ought to be fully satisfied that the scriptures contain this doctrine before we attempt its defence on the ground of revelation. If this doctrine be not contained in the bible, but is found only in the commentaries of men, we shall, by the attempt to support it, injure the cause which we aim to defend, and may lay a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in the way of numbers of our fellow-men. At

least, before any one can consistently bring the doctrine of eternal torments as an objection to the Christian system, he must prove that the scriptures contain it.

I am, my Christian brethren, so fully persuaded of your catholicism, that I conceive no apology on my part is necessary for explicitness. I feel the relation between you and me too sacred to admit of disguise. A love of truth, a sense of duty, an ardent desire to present Christianity clearly to your minds in its true light, a system perfectly consistent with the perfections of God, and altogether adapted to the nature of man, constrained me to lead your reflections to the subject before us. For myself, I freely declare, that, from a diligent examination of the New Testament, I am satisfied it does not contain the doctrine of punishment endless in its duration. I as fully believe that the sanction of the divine law will be inflicted. Every individual who becomes an incorrigible sinner under the dispensation of the gospel, may be assured that on him the punishment, denounced by Christ and his apostles against the transgressor, will be executed.

The belief that future punishment will be of limited duration, is not peculiar to modern times.—Some of the most celebrated of the Christian fathers held this opinion. Many other early professors embraced this doctrine. Some writers, indeed, boldly assert, that the opinion of endless punishment was not received among believers till philosophers introduced into their schools metaphysical disputations about time and space.

Many, who disbelieve the doctrine of eternal punishment, are afraid to avow their opinion, lest it should weaken the restraints of religion. This is not my fear. The certainty of merited punishment operates more powerfully on the human mind, than the threat of punishment, evidently disproportioned to crimes committed. The threatening will either be disbelieved, or a persuasion will be entertained that it will never be executed. Our duty is diligently to study the scriptures, and honestly to declare the truths of revelation as we understand them.—Consequences we may leave to the overruling providence of God.

SERMON XXVII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSAL RESTORATION.

2 THESSALONIANS i. 7, 8, 9.

When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

OUR general subject is the punishment allotted to the wicked in a future world. In the last discourse I proposed to consider the opinions entertained on the doctrine of future punishment, under the following propositions, viz.—

1. The punishment of the wicked in a future world will be endless in duration.

2. The punishments of a future state, being disciplinary, will, sooner or later, bring sinners to

repentance, and ultimately the whole human race will be made the subjects of salvation.

3. Future punishments will be of limited duration, and terminate in the annihilation of the wicked.

The first proposition has been discussed. Without repetition, I pass to the second, viz.—

2. The punishments of the future state being disciplinary, will, sooner or later, bring sinners to repentance, and ultimately the whole human race will be made the subjects of salvation.

The scheme of universal restoration was adopted by Origen, one of the distinguished fathers of the Christian church, who lived in the third century.—It has been embraced by numbers in every subsequent age; and many, who adopt it at the present day, give evidence by their lives that they possess the spirit of the gospel.

The Rev. Dr. Chauncy, a celebrated divine of our own country, may be considered as an original writer on this subject. He has stated the scheme in the clearest manner, added greatly to the arguments of its earlier advocates; and though we may not be induced by a perusal of his works to adopt his opinion, we shall be constrained to pay a tribute of respect to his learning and piety, his assiduity and candour.

Dr. Chauncy endeavours to prepare the minds of his readers without prejudice to attend to his arguments, by observations like the following:—
“The scheme before us exhibits the Deity in so amiable and interesting light, and reflects so much glory on the mediatorial undertaking of Jesus Christ,

that every man, one would think, should beforehand be disposed to wish that it might be well supported from the scriptures. Can the thought be displeasing to any son of Adam, that the whole human race shall finally have entrance ministered to them into the kingdom of heaven, to partake there of joys, that flow forever at God's right hand? Where is the man so destitute of benevolence, so bereft of humanity, as not to bid God speed to an attempt intended to establish it as a revealed truth, that this, before the scene of providence is finally shut up, shall be the portion of men of every nation, of every character, colour, station or condition? It is not to be supposed, that any should be so filled with envy, or soured by rancour, hatred or malice, as not to hope that so benevolent a plan may be found, upon the strictest inquiry, to be true."

The advocates for restoration profess to support it by reason and revelation. Natural arguments in its favour are drawn from the perfections of God, especially from his goodness, which is apparent in all his works and ways; and from the evident design of affliction and chastisement in the present state. God, it is said, is perfect in himself: he is over all, blessed forever. Creation, therefore, must have originated in benevolence. Man was designed for happiness. The purpose of God will stand. The end of human existence will be accomplished. All men will ultimately be happy.

Abstract arguments drawn from the benevolence of the Deity, when applied to the future happiness of all men, are not conclusive. At least, I never could perceive their force in this application. Ad-

mitted, they prove too much—prove that every created being will be exempted from pain and misery. The history of the world, and the experience of every individual, contradict the fact. Evil, natural and moral, has been introduced into our world. For their impiety and violence the antediluvians were destroyed: in its corruptions Sodom perished; and every descendant of Adam experiences a portion of sorrow and misery. The question is not whether God may not form a rational, moral being, whose every action shall be virtuous, and whose every moment of existence shall be happy? This is not doubted; but man is not this being. Grant that man was designed for happiness by his Maker—the question still arises, What is the happiness for which he is designed? It is happiness which will be conferred on him as the reward of the right use of his moral faculties. Man is made the subject of a moral government, laws are given him as the rule of his actions, and are enforced by suitable evidence and by solemn sanctions; and that obedience which flows from a teachable temper, from the love of truth, and from reverence to the authority of his God, prepares him for the happiness which is the end of his existence. Grant that man is a free, moral agent, and that the happiness for which he is designed is felicity, which results from the establishment of a pious and virtuous disposition—and it necessarily follows that the goodness of God is not pledged to confer happiness on the individual who abuses his moral liberty, corrupts his distinguishing faculties, and, by his vicious habits, disqualifies himself for that very happiness which is promised

as the reward of obedience. We may, I think, rest in the persuasion, that God, perfectly good and happy, would not give existence to intellectual, moral beings, when this existence must necessarily be miserable. But can it be inconsistent with the perfect goodness of Deity to bring into existence rational, moral, and free agents, to give them a field for the full display of their various faculties, to grant the necessary instruction, to provide them all needed assistance, and then to suspend his favours and their happiness on the condition of their maintaining their character as rational and moral beings, and by a wise and virtuous improvement of their talents, qualifying themselves for happiness of a rational, moral, and social nature ; and withhold this reward from those who have neglected to prepare themselves for its enjoyment ?

Perhaps it will be plead, that there seems to be but a shade of difference between the characters of those who stand in the lowest scale of acceptable virtue, and those who are rejected for the least degree of vice ; and to suppose that God, in the issue of his government, will make the difference of immortal happiness and eternal death, in the final allotments of these characters, is to impeach his administrations with partiality and injustice. Can this impeachment be supported ? In all the governments of this world, in all the publick institutions of human society, where certain privileges are proffered to all subjects and citizens on equitable conditions, and competent judges are appointed to decide on the qualifications of candidates—every applicant, who is found qualified, is invested with the proffer-

ed privileges. And is there injustice or partiality in withholding these privileges from all who have failed of complying with the equitable condition, though there be but little to distinguish the individual who is the least defective in the requisite qualification from him who barely possesses it? The prize was proffered to all, it is conferred on all who are fitted to receive it; and no injury is done to those, who have neglected to improve the means of acquisition.

Suppose God places free, moral beings in a state of probation, promising to reward those, who, by a wise and virtuous life, fit themselves for the society of heaven, with immortal felicity, and denouncing extinction of being on all who should habitually abuse their powers—would there be partiality or injustice, or a want of benevolence, in carrying into execution the penalty against all who neglect to comply with the condition?

In proof of the final happiness of all mankind, it has been urged “that all the evils that befall either body or mind in this state, have a tendency to improve one or both. Arguing from analogies taken from this state concerning that which is future, we ought to infer, that the evils of a future state will have the same tendency and final cause with those of the present life, viz. to meliorate and perfect our natures, and to prepare them for ultimate unlimited happiness.”

To all reasonings of this nature it may be replied, that the analogy, as far as it can be applied, bears against the supposition of the final restoration of all men. The severest publick punishments of this

world rarely correct a vitiated mind. "Vice and sin" are said to be, "in principle, disposition and habits, no less pernicious and fatal to the soul of man, than malignant disorders are to his corporeal frame. It deranges his mental and moral powers : it vitiates their soundness, and deadens their activity ; and in its progress and prevalence tends to the death and destruction of the intelligent and immortal spirit. We may partly infer from the present effects of human degeneracy, what may be its probable consequences and issue in a future state. As no present instruction or correction is sufficient to reclaim the licentious and profligate, and to recover them to penitence and virtue, it is possible, and indeed not very unlikely, that the more severe discipline of a future state of retribution may prove ineffectual to restrain rooted dispositions of vice, and to reform obstinate and imperious habits of sin, so that those who indulge them shall proceed from one stage of moral depravity to another, till they become altogether irreclaimable. As some bodily diseases advance from one stage of inveteracy to another, till they are absolutely irremediable, and must ultimately terminate in dissolution ; so vice, considered as a growing and deadly disease of the mental constitution, may end in its fatal derangement and final destruction. In such cases it seems to be inconsistent neither with justice nor benevolence, nor any known measure of the divine administration, to expunge characters of this kind from the book of life, and to consign the wicked, thus incapable of reformation, to utter annihilation."

But on the authority of scripture our opinion of the future condition of the wicked must be founded. What proof, then, do Universalists draw from revelation in support of their doctrine? They affirm that the whole representation of the bible is, that the mediation of Jesus Christ was adopted as a remedy for the apostacy; and the benefits of it are as extensive as were the effects of the fall. All men became subject to sin, misery and death by Adam's sin; and, by the efficacy of Christ's mediation, all men will ultimately be raised to life, to holiness, and to never-ending felicity. Numerous passages of the bible are selected as proofs of the truth of this statement. I can mention only a few of the more prominent, as examples. The 5th chapter to the Romans, from the 12th verse, is a principal passage.—“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. But not as the offence so also is the free gift; for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one, that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came on all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of

life. For, as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover, the law entered that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

The leading comments on these passages are, "that as on one hand Adam is considered as the source of damage to mankind universally—on the other that Christ is a like source of advantage to the same mankind; but with this difference, that the advantage on the side of Christ exceeds, overflows, abounds beyond the damage on the side of Adam, and this to mankind universally. The Apostle makes the damage on the side of Adam to consist in two things, viz. the subjection of all men to a frail mortal life on earth, and a liableness consequent upon it to be drawn into that which is sinful. The opposite superabounding advantage through Christ he accordingly places in two things, viz. a reign in life, and a being formed to a meetness for this mercy by being made righteous persons, and this notwithstanding the influence of all the sins that are consequent upon Adam's sin, whether in point of power or demerit; and this abounding advantage through Christ in both its branches is extended to the same mankind, who have suffered the opposite damage through Adam."

In this whole statement, I apprehend, Dr. Chauncy has pushed the language of St. Paul beyond its

true meaning. Its more obvious sense, it seems to me, gives no support to the scheme of universal restoration. We have no reason from scripture to suppose that if Adam had maintained his innocence, all his posterity would have been established in a condition of unchangeable happiness. What then did they lose by his fall? A probationary life, on the same conditions of divine favour and present happiness, which he originally enjoyed. Christ has ransomed all men from the death which was announced as the penalty of the original law of man, and through the Mediator they are placed in a state of probation, candidates for new rewards, and on new conditions. Thus far the damage consequent on Adam's sins is remedied. And the advantage by Christ far exceeds the damage by Adam. The tenure by which Adam held his happiness was perfect obedience to the divine law; and for one offence it was forfeited. The gospel, more mild and more gracious, allows the offender to renew himself by repentance: pardon is promised to every reformed sinner. Adam's reward for sinless obedience was happiness on earth—the Christian has the promise of eternal life in heaven to reward his sincerity of aims and endeavours. As sin abounded, grace does much more abound; as in Adam we all die, so in Christ Jesus are we all made alive. But the promises of the gospel are conditional; and they alone who comply with the condition can have a rational hope of the reward. This, Universalists on the Chauncean plan will allow: they will further acknowledge, that many die impenitent, and that punishments will be inflicted on them in a future world. Before we can

then consistently embrace their scheme, they must prove from scripture, not only that the mediatorial government of Christ will be continued in a future world, but also that under it, the wicked will be placed anew in a state of probation. They assert all this. They divide the mediatorial kingdom of Christ into two distinct parts—The first is limited to earth, and under his earthly reign many of the human race are made his willing subjects. The second will extend from the period of the general resurrection and judgment, to the end of the mediatorial reign, in which Christ will subdue all things unto himself, and then resign his power into the hands of God. In support of this statement, they produce passages of scripture of the following tenor—Christ tasted death for every man: he was made a propitiation for the sins of the world.—He will subdue all things unto himself, &c. The passage perhaps the most relied on is the following—“He must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject to *Him* who put all things under him, that God may be all and in all.” The advocates for universal restoration say that St. John carries our minds forward to the accomplishment of the glorious design of divine mercy, and in prophetic language gives us the hallelujahs of the angels of heaven and of all the restored race of Adam. “Every creature, which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honour and glory and power, be unto

Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever."

The comments on the quotations from the 5th, to the Romans, will apply to all texts from the New Testament which speak of Christ, as the Prince of Life, as dying for all men, as bearing the sins of the world, &c. These, I conceive, have reference to the agency of Christ in placing men in a state of salvation on the terms of the gospel. That the authorities brought from the 1st of Corinthians and from the Revelation are not conclusive in favour of universal restoration will appear, if we notice the pertinence of their application to a different scheme. Suppose the punishments of the wicked should terminate in the extinction of their existence, and how direct is the application of these texts to that supposition? Can there be a more complete conquest of enemies than the extinction of their existence? Must not the empire of death be terminated, when there is no victim on which his power can act? When all who opposed themselves to the moral government of God, are removed from being, then every heart and every tongue will be united in rendering praise, and honour, and glory to God. I do not now say that this will be the end of the wicked, but the pertinence of the language of St. Paul and St. John to this supposition must weaken the argument adduced from those passages in support of the doctrine of universal salvation.

The general language of the New Testament on the subject we are considering, to my apprehension, is opposed to the scheme of the Universalists. The representation of the bible seems to be, that the

present life is the allotted scene of human probation ; and that the judgment of the great day will determine the moral characters of men, and fix unalterably their condition in a future world. In the parables of our Lord, the statement is, that at the judgment, the tares and the chaff are to be separated, never more to be mixed. The wicked are to be rejected ; they are to perish. Our text declares that they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. The descriptions of the New Testament respecting future punishment are figurative ; but they are of a nature the most opposed to the supposition that the wicked will be recovered to virtue and happiness. The tares and the chaff are to be cast into fire that will not be quenched. The wicked will die the second death—they will be consumed—they will perish. Will those figures, will this language accord with the doctrine of universal restoration ? Besides, there are particular texts which directly militate with the doctrine. Our Saviour himself expressly declares, that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. He denounces a wo on Judas, and declares that it would have been good for him never to have been born. St. Paul informs us, “ if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin ; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary.” St. John says there is a sin unto death, for which men are not to pray. With what pertinence, or what meaning, do the sacred writers affirm, that the wicked will

perish, that they will be rejected, destroyed and lost; if they all are finally to be saved? Be the wish ever so strong that the doctrine of universal salvation may be true, for myself I cannot embrace it, because I cannot find scriptural authority for its support. If God has intentions of mercy for the wicked in a future world; he has not, to my understanding, revealed them in the gospel.

SERMON XXVIII.

ON THE ANNIHILATION OF THE INCORRIGIBLY WICKED.

MATTHEW x. 28.

Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

IN discoursing on the subject of future punishment, I have discussed the doctrine of endless misery, and of universal restoration. We are now to review that of absolute extinction, viz.

3. Future punishments will be of limited duration, and will terminate in the annihilation of the wicked.

This branch of our subject has been canvassed with great ability by several English divines. I shall attempt little more than to compress their arguments and observations within limits suited to a publick discourse. Judging of their remarks by

the test of scripture, my candid hearers, you will form your own opinions on the authority of revelation.

The declaration of the Old Testament is, “The soul that sinneth shall die.” Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, in our text cautions us, “Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” St. Paul, in the letter and spirit of both Old and New Testament, informs us that, “the wages of sin is death;” that “if we live after the flesh, we shall die,” &c. Let us then in the first place inquire into the meaning of the word death: and examine whether we are to understand the word, when connected with future punishments, in a literal or a figurative sense.

Death, when applied to our present existence, signifies the privation of life. When this term is applied to the soul, or to a future mode of existence, if understood in a strict or literal sense, it must mean the loss of that existence, that is, annihilation. A being cannot in strictness be said to die, unless he be deprived of a life which he before possessed. When therefore this word is used by the sacred writers to express the future punishment of wicked men, if understood literally, it cannot mean merely that they shall be excluded from the happiness of heaven—this they never enjoyed; nor can it mean, that they shall be kept forever in existence, that they may forever feel the severity of divine vengeance. To form an opinion of the meaning of any writer, we ought not to depart from the strict and proper sense of words, unless obvious reasons ren-

der it necessary. Whoever then considers the word death, when applied to sinners in a future world, to signify an eternal life of misery, must assign some substantial reason why a sense so opposite to its strict meaning should be adopted.

Let us next inquire, whether a figurative sense of the term death, when applied to the future punishment of wicked men, is necessary to render the language of scripture on this subject consistent with its general principles. Do the scriptures any where teach us, in plain and simple language, that wicked men shall for an endless duration be kept alive in a state of misery? If they do, we must understand death, when applied to this subject, in a limited and figurative sense. But what passage of the New Testament states expressly that the wicked shall be preserved in a state of endless misery? If there be no such passage found, then surely we ought not to advance the doctrine on the authority of revelation. The sacred writers, say the advocates for the doctrine of annihilation, have made use of various terms on the subject under consideration. They describe the punishment of the wicked by calling it a death—a destruction—a corruption—a fire that consumes and burns up the substances that are thrown into it—a worm which never dies—and a fire that is not quenched. Add to these, an everlasting destruction—an everlasting fire—an everlasting judgment—an everlasting punishment—a blackness of darkness forever; and, if those passages in the 14th and 20th chapters in Revelation relate to the final judgment, a torment forever and ever. But when the strict

and proper import of these phrases, as they stand in the original, comes to be considered, not one of them will be found necessarily to imply a perpetual existence in life, though a life of misery ; and a great part of these, if understood in a strict and proper sense of words, imply the contrary ; for to die—to be destroyed—to reap corruption, or a dissolution of parts—to burn up—to consume, when applied to the persons of men, are so far from implying a perpetual continuance of their lives, that on the contrary, these terms, if literally understood, suppose that a period will be put to life : and should their death or destruction be so circumstanced, as not to admit of any subsequent restoration, it may for that reason be styled an everlasting destruction ; and the means by which it is accomplished an everlasting or eternal fire, as Sodom and Gomorrah are said to have been set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire ; that is, a fire, the effects of which would continue forever ; not that these cities are still burning, which long since have been reduced to ashes. And if this death or destruction be administered by way of punishment, for the same reason that the death or destruction are said to be eternal, so may the punishment ; for by supposition it is a punishment which will never be reversed—a punishment, the effects of which will not, like the first death, be taken off, but continue forever. All this may be true, and the phraseology of scripture sufficiently accounted for, without laying us under any necessity of supposing the subjects of this punishment to be continued alive unconsumed, in a state of misery, contrary to that

which the strict and proper import of the words dying, destroying, consuming, and burning up, imply.

To add force to the above comments, we are told that the terms in the original languages of the bible, which in our translation are rendered eternal, and everlasting, and forever and ever, do not, from any power of the words themselves, imply what we mean by a strict and proper eternity. The original words in Hebrew and Greek, in strictness of speech, mean an age, and in the plural ages; and, though sometimes used to signify an indefinite duration, still it may be a duration vastly short of that which is strictly eternal. Thus the rainbow is a token of God's covenant for eternal generations. The land of Canaan was given to the children of Israel for an eternal possession. The passover was appointed for an eternal ordinance. The original word is used in the same limited sense in the New Testament. We read in Luke's gospel of prophets that have been from everlasting. St. Paul, speaking of a future life, says, God promised it before the world began, literally before the eternal times. It is then evident that the original word does not necessarily imply a strict and proper eternity. The same word is indeed sometimes used to express duration without end—to express the existence of God. But in these instances the subject constrains us to understand more than the word in itself necessarily expresses. A word that expresses an indefinite duration may with propriety be used to express eternal existence, or a period of long duration; and the subject to which it is applied will generally, from its nature, enable us to qualify

its sense. When we read of the eternal God, the everlasting hills, the everlasting mountains, &c. we find no difficulty to qualify the meaning of the writer. It is not the force of the word, but the nature of the subject, which determines its sense. From the term itself, therefore, no conclusive argument can be derived in favour of future punishment of eternal duration.

The same word is frequently used to express the duration of the future happiness of the righteous; but then there are other terms used which necessarily convey the idea of endless duration, as immortal, incorruptible, indissoluble, &c.

Had the scriptures compared the wicked in a future world to substances which will, without apparent diminution, bear the heat of an unquenchable fire, the allusion might have led us to suppose that misery of endless duration will be the portion of wicked men; but when it is expressly affirmed that they shall die, that they shall reap corruption—when they are compared to chaff and other substances which are the most easily consumed by fire—when it is said that they shall be burnt up—when it is said of the righteous they shall never die—when the terms expressive of life, of immortality, incorruptibility, &c. are applied only to the righteous, why should we infer from scripture that sinners will be tormented for an endless duration? No one will pretend that the soul of man is necessarily immortal. Every being of a derived existence is continually dependent on his Maker for its continuance; and should God withdraw his support, this being must drop into his primeval nothing.

Some, perhaps, may be disposed to remind me that the scriptures expressly inform us, that sinners shall be punished, in a greater or less degree, according to the aggravation of their guilt. Is the supposition, that the wicked shall at last be absolutely destroyed, inconsistent with the statement respecting the increase of punishment proportionate to the aggravation of guilt? Death executes its office on the body in various ways. The pain and distress attending the dissolution of the present life in degree and duration greatly differ. The second death may be executed with those circumstances which will apportion the misery of the sinner to his guilt. Indeed, it would be presumption to say, that a principle may not be established in the divine administrations, by which inveterate habits of sin shall produce the dissolution of the soul, in the same manner that inveterate diseases prove fatal to the body; and that their operations shall occasion sufferings in proportion to their inveteracy. Can the justice and goodness of God be so well defended on the supposition of eternity of punishment? Infinite duration seems to swallow up all proportions of misery. Or should different degrees of pain constitute a scale, can we imagine that God, wise, and just, and good, will forever preserve the existence of man, that man may forever be miserable, as a punishment of the sins of the present life, when God knows our frame, when he considers that we are but dust, and that we are surrounded with temptations, which daily press upon us? Can we conceive of any solid reasons why sin and misery should for-

ever be preserved under the government of almighty power, infinite wisdom, and perfect benevolence?

I shall now proceed to a more particular consideration of those passages of the New Testament, which describe the future punishment of the incorrigibly wicked. I shall first introduce a passage from the gospel of Mark.—“Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” These expressions, without violence, may be understood to indicate the final destruction of the wicked. This seems to be their obvious and natural signification. What is the meaning of these terms when applied to the concerns of the present life? If a building is on fire, and the fire cannot be extinguished, what is the result?—The building is consumed. If a plant or a flower be infected by a worm, and the worm cannot be destroyed, it must be expected that the plant will perish, and the flower decay. If a man labours under a disease which originated from worms in the seat of life, and he knows that the worms cannot be destroyed, he must expect that death will be the final consequence. But with what propriety can a worm, which is the emblem of corruption, and fire, which is the instrument of consumption, be made to represent an eternal duration of existence? It is an abuse of figures which we ought not without necessity to impute to the sacred writers. To throw chaff or wood into the fire is the way to destroy them. To cast a man into the fire is an effectual method to kill him. The less extinguishable is the fire, the more certain is his death. A passage in the Revelation of St. John will strengthen the comments on the passage

before us. We there read, that “death and hell, or the grave, shall be cast into the lake of fire.”—We cannot suppose that the meaning of this passage is, that death and the grave will forever be tormented; but that they shall be abolished: these shall no longer be known in the mediatorial kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The declaration of our Saviour in the 25th of Matthew, is adduced as an authority for the doctrine of perpetuity of future punishment. “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” In addition to the remarks on the word everlasting, I would direct your attention to the sense of similar expressions in other places in the New Testament. St. Jude tells us, as we have already noticed, that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire; and St. Peter observes, that God, turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example to those who should after live ungodly. All that we can understand from these modes of expression is, that Sodom and Gomorrah were absolutely destroyed by fire from heaven; and from the same mode of speech when applied to the future punishment of the wicked, we may consistently understand our Saviour to say, that the wicked shall be destroyed—that life shall never be restored to them. We read in scripture of eternal redemption: not that God will be forever redeeming men; but the blessed effects of redemption will be eternal. In the same sense we may understand the punishment of eternal fire, of eternal destruction, &c: not that the

act of destruction, or the fire of consumption will be perpetual and eternal, but the effects will be.—The destruction which will never be reversed may with strict propriety be called an everlasting punishment.

Passages are selected from the books of Revelation in support of the doctrine of eternal punishment.—“If any one worship the beast or his image, the same drinketh of the wine of the wrath of God; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.”—In the original for ages of ages.—Again.—“And fire came down from heaven and devoured them, (the armies of Gog and Magog) and the devil, that deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where is the beast and the false prophets; and they shall be tormented forever and ever;” for ages. Whether these passages do or do not refer to the punishments of men in a future world, to them will apply the observations made upon the words everlasting, eternal, &c. In the original language, the words translated forever and ever express an indefinite period of time, and from them the perpetuity of the misery of the wicked in a future world cannot be proved.

From a serious and close review of the various passages which have reference to the future punishment of the incorrigibly wicked, do we find that the doctrine of endless torment is clearly contained in the scriptures? Do not these passages more obviously signify destruction, annihilation?

One consideration I wish in this place to present to your minds—of its weight you will judge. The original threatening made to Adam as the punish-

ment of disobedience was death. That is, as I understand it, extinction of being. From this penalty all men are redeemed by Jesus Christ. We are all made candidates, on new conditions, for the rewards of immortality. The penalty of a neglect to comply with the conditions of salvation is death. That is, the impious and the abandoned of all nations and ages will be made to suffer the miseries of the second death, and their sufferings will bear an exact proportion to their guilt.

In our present state, it must be difficult to form adequate apprehensions of the condition of being in a future world. With our present senses it may be impossible rightly to conceive of a new mode of existence. The language of scripture, on this subject, is figurative; and even in respect of the righteous, we are told, that it doth not yet appear what they shall be. But, on the one hand, it is clearly revealed to us, that the righteous shall be made happy in heaven, and that this happiness shall be endless in duration; and, on the other, that the wicked shall be made miserable as long as they exist as wicked characters. No reflecting, sober man can, on the authority of the Christian revelation, expect to escape the wages of sin, or promise himself future felicity, unless he acquire the Christian character. This is enough for all the purposes of piety and virtue. Who that reflects will, for the profits or pleasures of sin, incur the penalty of the second death?

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE FUTURE HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then I shall know even as also I am known.

THIS passage of scripture I have selected as the theme of a discourse on the rewards promised by Jesus Christ to the pious and good in the kingdom of heaven. The changes which death will produce cannot with precision be ascertained. Intimately associated with objects of sense, we can but imperfectly conceive of the capacities, the employments, or the happiness of just men inheriting the promises. But the future life, it is presumed, will be a continuation of the present : personal identity will be preserved : men will exist in heaven with intellectual and moral faculties like those they possessed on earth ; and their employments and happiness will be adapted to the dispositions which they here

formed, and the habits here established. The enjoyments of the next state, therefore, must be active in their nature, and proportioned to improvements made during the life of probation. The enjoyments of heaven will not consist of any determinate and fixed degree of felicity. Saints in the kingdom of light will make progressive improvements in knowledge and virtue, and rise to ever increasing attainments in happiness. This happiness, then, must consist in the constant progress of our intellectual, moral, and social faculties towards perfection.* In this relation let us contemplate it.

1. The rewards of heaven will consist in the progressive improvement of our intellectual faculties.

The intellectual faculty of man is capable of great improvement in the present limited state. By its vigorous exercise, individual men have risen to worthy apprehensions of the character of God, and have acquired an extensive acquaintance with his works and ways; and the knowledge thus obtained has been applied to the most useful purposes of human life. But by the influence of animal passions, by the prejudices of a corrupt education, and by the necessary business of the world, the intellectual improvements of most men have been confined within narrow bounds; and the knowledge of the most cultivated minds much circumscribed. Even Christians, with their superiour advantages, have entertained debasing opinions of the perfections and government of God, and inconsistent views of the religion of his Son, Jesus Christ. Some bewilder

* See Dr. JAMES FOSTER on future rewards and punishments,

themselves in metaphysical subtleties, and others are blinded by false zeal. Some, forming their apprehensions of divine attributes from the constituent principles of human nature, in their conceptions of God debase his character; and others cherish those superstitious views of Divine Providence which disturb their own minds, and destroy the peace and happiness of their lives.

Such are the weakness and imperfection of our present state of intellectual agency; but in heaven animal propensities being purified, and every worldly bias removed, men will be better disposed for intellectual pursuits. Reason will there possess its full strength, and the understanding its extent of comprehension. There, saints will have worthy and exalted views of God in all his attributes and administrations, and their conceptions of moral truth and duty will be without confusion. They will clearly understand those divine dispensations, which now perplex their moral inquiries; and perceive that now apparent irregularities of Providence all tend to promote one wise and benevolent purpose. To the view of the citizens of the heavenly Zion the natural and moral system of the universe will open its now concealed glories, and they will survey innumerable beauties and innumerable excellencies, which at present lie beyond the reach of human faculties.

Can we stretch our imaginations so far as to anticipate the delight we shall receive from the contemplation of the brighter displays of divine wisdom, power, and goodness? The most languid view of this enjoyment will convince us of the dig-

nity of our natures, and enkindle a divine ardour to prepare ourselves for the scenes which will be unfolded to our view when we shall be admitted to the more immediate presence of our God. St. Paul, in a previous verse, informs us that in heaven the embarrassments of this world, in the path of knowledge, shall be removed.—“When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away;”—and in our text—“Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.”—Now the man who seeks truth in the love of it, is often, on subjects the most important, perplexed with difficulties and doubts, and seldom can rest with perfect confidence in his conclusions; but then knowledge will be accompanied with certainty and satisfaction. Now the purest intellectual acquisitions are frequently prevented from producing their proper effects on practice by opposing interests of the world, or by irregular impulses of animal passion and appetite; but then the intellect will have an uncontrolled influence, and, in every practical concern, knowledge produce its proper effect. Now the man who the most scrupulously in practice follows the dictates of an enlightened mind, fails of enjoying all the happiness to which his knowledge and virtue tend, by the interposing selfishness, bigotry, or malevolence of his fellow beings; but then, extraneous causes not operating, intellectual exercises will produce all their practical fruits, and knowledge and virtue be rewarded with their appropriate enjoyments.

2. Progressive attainments in moral life will compose an essential part of the rewards of heaven.

In this view, the happiness of heaven rises on the scale of intrinsic value. Moral attributes are more excellent than intellectual. Goodness of heart is of more worth than greatness of mind. Moral attainments lay a more sure foundation for happiness than acquisitions of knowledge. On earth, the moral exercises of the best men are weak and imperfect. Moral principles are checked in their operation by the bias of animal propensities and worldly circumstances; and the virtue of the best man is variable and defective. But in heaven, moral pursuits will neither be interrupted nor weakened by inferior affections or momentary interests. Virtuous principles there will have a consistent and invariable operation, and ever prove effectual.

The positive institutions of the gospel which are adapted to our present state of action, will terminate with this life; but all the moral duties which have their foundation in the imperishable attributes and unchangeable relations of man are of perpetual obligation. Charity never faileth. The love of God and the love of man will live in the minds of perfect saints, become a purer flame, and produce sublimer effects. In heaven, all devotional and pious offices will be a rational, exalted, and improving exercise. Benevolence will be disinterested, ever productive of benefit to its object, and prove satisfactory to him who exercises it. On earth, various circumstances arise to debase our best moral exercises, and retard our progress towards the goal of perfection; yet even here, a pure disposition and a

well-governed mind are the source of our highest pleasures. These pleasures resemble the happiness of the highest orders of created beings, and are the nearest approach to the blessedness of God himself. In this view of the rewards of heaven, they appear worthy of the character of him who proposed them, and suited to the capacities of their recipients. The course of moral improvement to the inhabitants of heaven will be endless, and their enjoyments will increase with their progress in moral life. What satisfaction, then, will they realize in their constant approach to the character of supreme excellence, and as they become perfect in their measure as God is perfect. True goodness is the image of God in our souls; and the more we are transformed into the divine image, the greater will be our felicity. While we contemplate these rewards, do they not become the objects of supreme desire? Are not the strongest resolutions formed vigorously to exert every faculty in the preparation for their enjoyment?

3. In heaven, the social enjoyments of the righteous will be perfected.

All good desires and benevolent affections will survive death, and increase in strength with our intellectual and moral improvements. Without society, some of the noblest powers of rational beings would be useless; and absolute solitude is contemplated by every mind as a state in which existence can never be enjoyed with satisfaction and delight. In this imperfect state, selfish feelings and worldly competitions so much prevail as to take from our social connexions their purest joys. Friendships

are frequently formed without deliberation, are continued without satisfaction, or in disgust are dissolved. Our greatest social pleasures are often disturbed by incautious liberties and unreasonable resentments; by unfounded jealousies and envious dispositions. Friends of congenial minds and ingenuous hearts often suffer from sympathy with each other for their personal troubles, worldly disappointments, or providential afflictions. On earth, the most virtuous friendships and endearing relations are soon dissolved by death. But in heaven, these abatements of social happiness will not be experienced. Purified, ourselves, from every base and dissocial passion, we shall join a society composed of beings possessing improved understandings and benevolent and amiable dispositions; beings who resemble God in truth, righteousness and goodness, and who take the highest delight in promoting each others happiness. There, the harmony of friends will never be interrupted by the irritating language of suspicion, or the hasty expressions of petulance. There, susceptibility will not be wounded by the sight of sickness, distress, and anguish; nor will fears be alarmed by a prospect of a dissolution of social enjoyments; but there, tears will be wiped from every face, and death swallowed up in victory.

In heaven, we may expect to be re-united with those pious relatives and connexions with whom we held our Christian course on earth. Though the passions and affections which are merely adapted to the objects of this world be lost in the grave, yet there is reason to believe that in a higher condition

of existence virtuous friends, who here mutually assisted each other in their Christian pursuits, will in heaven recognize their former acquaintance, and receive increased pleasure from a review of their Christian course on earth. The Apostle clearly intimates that the disciples, who were converted to Christianity under his ministry, will be the crown of his joy at the final judgment—"What is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus, at his coming?" And in another place—"As ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even so ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus." If the joy of the pastor will receive an increase in heaven by meeting the members of his flock, who can doubt that individual disciples will there renew their acquaintance, and derive increased pleasure from their renewed friendship?

The scriptures expressly inform us, that in the next stage of our existence we shall be admitted not only to the spirits of just men made perfect, but also to an innumerable company of angels; doubtless to converse with them, to be improved by their communications, and with their assistance to quicken our steps in the path which leads to the perfection of our characters and to the consummation of our happiness. We then shall be admitted to a personal view of Jesus the mediator, to know the extent of his benevolent agency, to feel gratitude more nearly proportioned to the benefits received, and to derive greater advantages from his instruction and example.

As the completion of the rewards of heaven, we shall be admitted to the more immediate presence of God, the original parent of all life and blessedness. Who can estimate the felicity of those, who shall forever dwell in the fulness of the divine presence? They will more and more comprehend the perfections of Deity; their dispositions and their services will rise in purity and worth with their improvements in knowledge; and their happiness will increase as they make nearer approaches to the character of their heavenly Father. When men in their progressive attainments in intellectual, moral and social life shall have arrived to the station which the highest angel now fills, there will yet be an infinite distance between them and God over all blessed forever, and therefore an infinite space for the expansion of their minds, the increase of their goodness, and the augmentation of their enjoyments. On this supposition, angels and men will forever be advancing in intellectual and moral attainments, and their happiness ever be increasing as their capacities of enjoyment are enlarged.

In conclusion.

By the goodness of God, I have been permitted, my Christian hearers, to complete the course of sermons in conformity to the plan originally presented to your view. Has this course been the means of Christian instruction and improvement to any?

The Christian revelation, when understood, vindicates the ways of God with man. Its sacred beams dispel the clouds which hung over a future state and obscured its prospects; and we now have a clear view of the eternal world. The plan of

moral government, unfolded by the gospel, reflects the wisdom and goodness of God on all the dispensations of Providence, and teaches us the design of all the divine administrations. By its light we perceive the inseparable connexion between virtue and happiness, and vice and misery. The diligent study of the sacred oracles will enlighten our minds with the knowledge of truth, and instruct us in our duty. Serious reflections on the final issue of the divine government will fortify our resolution to meet all the conflicts of the Christian warfare, insure constancy in our Christian profession, animate our obedience, and in us confirm the hope of a blessed immortality.

On the verge of time, when all the momentous interests of eternity are before us, the whole train of worldly pursuits and sensual pleasures disappear, or remain in the mind to open afresh the wounds of conscience, and to excite the more distressing forebodings of future retribution. But death is disarmed of terror in respect to that person, who has faithfully run the Christian race, finished his course and kept the faith. Permit me importunately to request each of you to form a conception of the elevation to which that man is raised, who, just entering the invisible world, reflects on a course of Christian obedience that by divine assistance he has completed, and anticipates the immortal rewards promised by his Saviour. Place yourselves in this situation, and say, whether any human pursuit can be compared with the spirit and the habits of the Christian? Is there an object within human acquisition

estimable like Christian piety and virtue, in its present effects and future rewards ?

To secure the invaluable blessings of the Christian dispensation to the children of men, Jesus, the son of God, appeared on earth, passed a life of poverty and persecution, and died a victim on the cross. To establish our faith in his promises, he called his friend Lazarus from the grave, re-animated the youth of Nain on his herse, and himself arose in triumph from the tomb. To prepare men for the immortal rewards of heaven, the gospel was published, the Christian ministry appointed, and all the institutions of the New Testament established. And as the means of this preparation are we directed to attend the preached word, and observe the rites of our religion.

No one can with indifference contemplate a blessed immortality. Immortal happiness is an object of infinite value, and not an individual can deliberately reject it. Soon you will individually be summoned before the Judge of all, to render an account of the manner in which you shall have improved your Christian privileges. Examine yourselves. How have you used the talents committed to your management ? Have your moral attainments corresponded with your Christian advantages ? On what evidence do you rest your persuasion, that you are qualified for the society of heaven ? Do your conversation and general conduct comport with your Christian vocation ? Are you conscious that you live habitually under impressions of divine superintendence, and with a view to divine approbation ? Do you live habitually in the exercise of rational offi-

ees of piety? Are you just, benevolent and charitable to your fellow-men? Do you keep yourselves unspotted from the world; and, under the influence of our religion, discipline your passions and appetites? Are the members of this church steadfast, and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord? Do heads of families faithfully perform their duty towards each other, and to their children and dependents? Are the aged of this society sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, and patience? Do they still bring forth fruit, and is the hoary head to them a crown of glory, being found in the way of righteousness? Are our youth sober-minded? Do they remember their Creator; and have they commenced the life which becomes candidates for eternal happiness? Can you, my Christian brethren, answer these questions in the affirmative? Then you may apply to yourselves the promises of the gospel; and, persevering in your course, anticipate the joyous sentence of your Judge—"Well done, good and faithful servants: enter ye into the rewards of your Lord."

May we all be animated to live consistently with our Christian hope. When the heavens and the earth shall be dissolved, may our corruptible put on incorruption, our mortal put on immortality, and we join in the song of victory over sin, death, and the grave, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ERRATA.

Page 176, sixth line from the bottom, for *become not*, read *did not become*.

Page 213, eighth line from the bottom, for *has*, read *hast*.

Page 258, third line from the bottom, for *they*, read *those*.

JAN 23 1959

